SERMONS,

CHIEFLY UPON

RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY,

BY THE

AUTHOR

OF THE

ESSAYS

ON

PUBLIC WORSHIP, &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

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DIFFICULTIES

OF

SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

BRITISH MUSEUM

SERMONS.

SERMON VIII.

DIFFICULTIES OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

Pſalm xix. ver. 12.

"*Who can underſtand his errors? Cleanſe*
"*thou me from ſecret faults.*"

IN the great liſt of human misfortunes, there are but few, if there are any, of a more general and more unhappy influence than thoſe which ariſe from ignorance of the moral nature of our diſpoſitions, and miſtakes con-

cerning many of those habits which affect our behavior and our enjoyments. I think there can be no reasonable doubt, that the psalmist means this kind of error. The phrase *secret faults* has led some commentators to think, that he meant those sins which *he himself* was conscious of, but which were unknown to the world. My objection to this interpretation is, that it makes the former part of the verse unintelligible; for, I think, it cannot, properly, be said of the man who conceals his crimes from the *world only*, and not from *himself also*, that he has any difficulty in *understandinghis errors*. Besides, he adds, in the next verse, keep back thy servant also from *presumptuous* sins: which does not at all favor the opinion, that he meant by *secret faults*, those faults which are concealed from the world only; because, if they were not concealed from God or from himself, there was no propriety in distinguishing them from *presumptuous sins*. I shall therefore suppose, that the words of the text have a reference to that deficiency in the knowledge of our own characters, and that misappre-

prehenſion and error concerning many of our habits and diſpoſitions, which have very unhappy effects on our tempers and enjoyments.

The influence of our ignorance and error is ſo extenſive, and their effects are ſo numerous, that one can hardly bring a clear account of them into the ordinary compaſs of a ſermon.

I know not whether I may or may not be miſtaken, in being of opinion, that this is the *general* and *principal* ſource of unhappineſs to thoſe who are not directly and notoriouſly wicked; I am however, very certain, it is a ſource which will never be wholly dried up; that it will always accompany imperfection, and will always mix its waters, more or leſs, with thoſe ſprings from which we draw our pleaſures.

I. In the methods we take to preſerve the health and vigor of our bodies, where we are ſincerely intereſted, and where experience ſoon furniſhes us with materials for reflection; how much at random do we act?

how numerous are our miſtakes? We piteouſly complain of the interruptions of our health, and are unhappy under any diſorder, yet when it has left us, we act, in many reſpects, as if we had a deſign of ſubmitting to it again.

I do not mean to ſay, that every interruption of health is owing to the ſufferer's own fault. We often, perhaps always, inherit from our parents the ſeeds of diſorders; we were formed imperfect, and deſigned to be mortal; and yet half the evils ariſing from ill-health which befall mankind, are owing to the moſt childiſh inattention and error. It is a maxim, probably as old as the creation, that temperance is neceſſary to the enjoyment of health and the preſervation of life: *every* man profeſſes to believe this: every *poor* man *knows* it to be true. Thoſe people who groſly and violently tranſgreſs this maxim, always ſuffer in their health, but they always know why they ſuffer; and thoſe who trangreſs it by ſmall and habitual deviations, ſuffer in their health as certainly as the former, but they

they know not *why* they ſuffer, and would think themſelves greatly injured by the moſt diſtant hint of their irregularity or intemperance.

What renders this caſe deplorable, is that in every improved and opulent country, moſt people are educated in prepoſſeſſions unfavorable to temperance; they hear little on the ſubject of health, beſides the myſterious phraſeology of a profeſſion, or the unintelligible language of an art; the plain and intelligible voice of nature is but ſeldom heard, or but ſeldom regarded. They find many things, prepared by the ſkill and ingenuity of men, to ſtrengthen their conſtitutions, and chear their ſpirits; to prevent all their diſorders, or to remove them when by any means they have eſcaped their vigilance. The plain path pointed out by nature, is deſerted for an intricate one, pointed out by art: men loſe their health, and bring on innumerable miſeries by thoſe very means which they uſe to preſerve the one, and ward off the others: they bemoan themſelves and

complain of their lot, when in fact, all their unhappineſs is of their own procuring. They, poſſibly, think it very hard, that ſo much attention, care, and ſkill ſhould be baffled; not conſidering that the moſt ingenious and learned men, know little more of the human conſtitution than that it exiſts under a certain form, and is capable of certain actions, that they cannot with any truth or modeſty undertake to ſuperintend and regulate its motions; and that they muſt be miſchievous to mankind in a greater or leſs degree according to their greater or leſs preſumption in quickening, retarding and directing thoſe ſprings of life and health, which were given by the Almighty, and are underſtood by him alone.

We live in habits of indiſcretion and intemperance, while we think ourſelves diſcreet and temperate; we ruin our conſtitutions and deſtroy our lives, while we think we are improving, or preſerving them; we have not the ſlighteſt conſciouſneſs of having done wrong; we complain of what we ſuffer as

of

of an injury which we have not deſerved, and we die with the great ſatisfaction of having born the evils which we ſay have been allotted us and brought upon us as by an arbitrary diſpoſition of providence, but which, in fact we have wholly brought on our ſelves.

A conſiderate and reaſonable man, viewing this caſe of mankind, muſt ſincerely pity its weakneſs, would naturally direct his thoughts to the Deity, and addreſs him in the words of the text, Who, O Lord, can underſtand his errors?

II. As moral beings, in our ſocial capacities, we are unhappy from ſimilar cauſes; and ſome of the beſt ends of public inſtitutions and private connexions are defeated by our *ſecret faults*.

As members of a community, and ſubjects of a government, we generally find abundant cauſes of complaint from errors and vices in the management of public affairs; *merely* becauſe we are uneaſy in our ſelves and diſpoſed to complain. I do not mean to direct your thoughts to any particular meaſures

ſures in the management of our own public affairs; much leſs would I offer an apology for any inſtance of public miſbehavior, or public oppreſſion. I would keep clear of the province of a politician, as my buſineſs is with thoſe things which are in the power of individuals, and affect their morality and happineſs; and though individuals are the parts of which the public is compoſed, and the ſum of their conduct muſt conſtitute the public virtue or public vice; though they may be intereſted in an uncommon manner, on uncommon occaſions, and be led into public and important miſtakes; yet it may be a preacher's duty to keep clear of what affects the whole, and animadvert on thoſe things which affect only parts of the whole; his province is not the public laws, or the adminiſtration of public buſineſs, but the rules of morality and the conduct of individuals.

In the beſt *times*, and under the beſt *adminiſtration* of public affairs, we meet with many who are diſcontented and uneaſy; not from

from any reaſonable occaſions which have been given them, but from what lies intirely within themſelves. One man has been educated in, or read himſelf into an opinion, that deſpotiſm or arbitrary power in the ſupreme magiſtrate, is the only thing that can ſecure the public happineſs: but he lives in a republic, enjoys the protection of its laws, and avails himſelf of all its peculiar advantages; he diſquiets himſelf:—And wherefore?—He will ſay it is becauſe his fellow ſubjects are ſo weak and ſo blind to their intereſts as to ſubmit to a government which has no foundation in reaſon or religion: but the truth is, becauſe he himſelf is conceited, and underſtands not the duty of his ſtation. Another, who is born the ſubject of a monarchy, takes up the principles of a republican. He harbors wiſhes in favor of his country, which ſerve only to torment himſelf: he complains with bitterneſs of his unfortunate ſituation; and is even diſpleaſed with thoſe who accommodate themſelves to their circumſtances, and who do not think and ſpeak as he does.

This

This is the caſe of many under all the different forms of adminiſtration, which human ſocieties have aſſumed. There are always ſome, who are poſſeſſed of an opinion, that they could contrive a better form than that under which they live. There can be no harm in entertaining ſuch an opinion: the harm ariſes from their uneaſineſs, becauſe their opinion is not generally adopted, and publicly acted upon. Theſe people do not conſider, that forms of government are ſeldom the *inventions of human reaſon:* they are generally brought about by *circumſtances* and *events ſeemingly accidental*; certainly under no *direction*, but that of Providence. They do not ſee, therefore, that it is the duty of a ſubject, except on very extraordinary occaſions, to accommodate himſelf as much as poſſible to his ſituation, and to ſubmit to the laws, inſtitutions and cuſtoms of his country.

III. In the relations of private life, the ſame cauſes produce the ſame effects. The tendereſt and beſt affections of our hearts, are

are made to give way to theſe *ſecret faults*. We harbor an humor, and indulge a paſſion; —we are vain;—or negligent;—or reſerved;—or peeviſh;—and that to a degree that it muſt be impoſſible to live with us, with pleaſure, or tranquility. We eſtrange the hearts of our beſt friends; we loſe all our valuable acquaintance; we complain of what we ſuffer; and rail at the neighborhood or country in which we live; we are blind to the cauſes of theſe things; we have the aſſurance to ſuppoſe, and even openly to ſay that the public is in the wrong, and we alone are in the right; every occaſion of uneaſineſs lies without us, among our ſinful fellow-creatures, and we find ourſelves unable to remove them by the moſt abundant and moſt ſevere cenſures and reproaches; whereas, if we could look inward, with a little impartiality, we ſhould have a very different view of things; we ſhould then ſee that our own errors were the cauſes of our unhappineſs: that we never loſt a ſincere and worthy friend, but on account of ſomething

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in ourſelves, that was really, or appeared to be, amiſs; that we have ſeldom *juſt* reaſons for cenſure and railing; and that we are *never* ſo certain of having thoſe juſt reaſons, as when we employ ourſelves on our own peculiarities, affectations, and follies.

IV. Theſe kinds of errors and miſtakes concerning ourſelves, have very bad effects on that part of our religion which goes under the name of piety. They prevent our forming juſt and rational conceptions of the divine attributes and character. The method we take, in order to arrive at the knowof God's moral character, is to improve on the ſeveral parts of our own; and, I ſuppoſe in almoſt all caſes, we make our God to be ſuch a one as ourſelves; only allowing him to be poſſeſſed, in an infinitely higher degree, of thoſe excellent qualities, diſpoſitions and powers which we find in ourſelves. It is very probable then, if we have any failings which we do not look upon as failings, that we ſhall include them in our idea of the divine character; as there will appear to us no reaſon

ſon againſt blending with the divine perfections, whatever we reckon innocent and uſeful in ourſelves. We, therefore, univerſally find, the vain and proud fond of attributing to God nothing but what is grand, ſplendid, and oſtentatious: the gloomy, peeviſh, and envious imagine the Deity to be as they are, always fretting at every appearance of chearfulneſs and happineſs among mankind: and the ill-natured and cruel ſeem to think he can have little elſe to engage his contemplation, but puniſhment, damnation, and hell-fire. On the other hand, the good-natured, the indolent, and the eaſy imagine God to poſſeſs their diſpoſitions in the higheſt degrees, and to have an utter diſlike to every thing that requires activity, or is attended with diſturbance and pain; the formal, ſcrupulous, and ſuperſtitious ſeem to think him always employed in ſettling forms and ceremonies, and narrowly watching the little ſlips and harmleſs deviations of his creatures.

Thus

Thus every one has a god of his own; and that god is good or bad, reſpectable or ridiculous, as the man who forms his character is himſelf the one or the other. Hence have ariſen many forms of worſhip and devotion, and violent contentions about thoſe forms; and hence have ariſen various ſpeculations and doctrines, and the moſt violent diſputes concerning them. Some very great evils have been the conſequences of theſe things. Individuals, neighborhoods, and kingdoms have had their peace broken in upon, and been entirely ruined by contentions, if we believe the parties in them, about the principles of piety, and the doctrines of religion; whereas, in the whole number of human miſtakes, none can be further than this from the truth. We may adopt it as a maxim of undoubted certainty, that among truly pious and religious men, there cannot poſſibly ariſe a diſpute about religion, productive even of hatred, much leſs of malignant cruelty, violence and murder.

Theſe

Theſe evils cannot ariſe from any religious or virtuous principle; and when they are not owing to ambition, policy, or private revenge, under the maſks of piety and zeal, they are owing to our *ſecret faults*. We make the Deity ſuch a one as ourſelves. The proud man inſiſts upon it, he is like him: No, ſays the gloomy, he muſt be ſuch a one as I am; the gloomy is contradicted by the gay, the active by the indolent; and the good-natured by the ill-natured. Here lie the ſources of thoſe evils which we attribute to religion. Real piety and true religion have no concern in them, their names are *borrowed* by one or the other of our paſſions; and we often fancy we are ſtriving for their intereſt and advantage, when we are, in fact, ſtriving for our own, and endeavoring to form every thing after the models of our own minds and our own characters.

The influence of theſe ſecret faults is in nothing more evident than when it affects our reſignation to the will of heaven, and our con-

tentment in thoſe ſituations and circumſtances which are allotted us.

The licence which men allow themſelves, in animadverting on the ways of God, affords one of the moſt ridiculous inſtances of human vanity. We very often obſerve a man ſitting in judgment, with great ſolemnity, on the creation of God, and the diſpoſition of its various parts. He ſeems to think he has a perfect comprehenſion of God's works, and can enter, with eaſe, into all his deſigns. Whereas by very few, and very ſimple queſtions, you would find, he is in total ignorance of thoſe things; and that the conſtruction and deſign of the moſt common and leaſt noble parts of nature, have ſomething in them far above his comprehenſion. If you can mortify his vanity ſo far as to make him ſenſible of this, he will probably aſk, why he was not created with a more enlarged apprehenſion. It would be in vain to ſay that you cannot tell why he was created at all, any more than he can tell why many of the parts of inanimate nature

ture have been created. He muſt be therefore left to be cured of his preſumption, by the inconveniences and evils which always accompany it.

But the grand ſubject of human ſpeculation is the moral government of God. It lies more out of reach than the natural government; men, therefore, may be abſurd in their conjectures about it with greater ſafety. The diſtribution of good and evil, has puzzled every one who has thought fit to conſider it, otherwiſe than in the moſt general manner, and with a mind really virtuous and religious. A man who never imagines himſelf out of his proper rank, cannot poſſibly entertain ſo extravagant a thought, as to ſuppoſe he can comprehend the deſigns of God, with relation even to mankind. Every man, therefore, forms an opinion of the conduct of God, as he is, or is not, influenced by one of thoſe ſecret faults which ſo much embarraſs and torment mankind. The melancholy, diſcontented and peeviſh, give a very dark account of this affair; they cannot be perſuaded that happineſs is the end of

exiſtence, becauſe they are not happy. The conceited and opinionative are ready to fly in the face of Omnipotence, and ſpeak with bitterneſs of the diſpoſition of things. Every one who cheriſhes *ſecret* faults, cheriſhes evils which generally taint his whole mind; he views the conduct of God with a diſtempered eye; and varies in his opinions only when his errors vary. This is ſo remarkably true, that an acute and ſhrewd diſputant has often had his real character minutely examined, and the particular temper and bent of his mind accurately traced and judged of by a cool and penetrating antagoniſt, while he has been vainly thinking that antagoniſt was attending with care and admiration to his eloquence and reaſoning.

When we diveſt ourſelves of all prepoſſeſſions; when our thoughts are ſincerely employed on our duties, every thing has a natural and happy appearance; we conduct ourſelves; we think of, and behave to the world; and we adore and obey Almighty God with perfect complacency and reſignation.

tion. The great ſources of our unhappineſs lie within ourſelves; and there are but few caſes in which we ſhould not be benefited by recollecting the ſentiment of the pſalmiſt, and addreſſing God as he did, with reverence and humility, *O Lord, who can underſtand his errors, cleanſe thou me from ſecret faults.*

ON

PREACHING CHRIST.

ON

PREACHING CHRIST.

SERMON X.

I. Cor. i. ver. 14.

"*We preach Chriſt.*"

AMONG the great number of ſcripture phraſes, wreſted from their original meaning, to ſerve the private purpoſes of individuals, and the peculiar intereſts of parties, none is more diſtinguiſhed than this which I have choſen for my text. The meaning of it is as obvious as that of any in the New Teſtament; and one would think no man in

in his ſenſes could give it any other meaning than that the apoſtle preached the religion of Chriſt. I believe however, from the apoſtle's time to this, by far the greateſt part of our moſt zealous chriſtians never thought of ſuch an interpretation. To give you their interpretations, would be to give you an account of all the whims and abſurdities, which have diſtinguiſhed the numerous ſects of chriſtians from the firſt inſtitution of their religion. Every party had its peculiar method of preaching Chriſt, and that method was the only one, with every individual of that party. To give you a particular account of them would be impracticable indeed in the compaſs of a ſermon, and would be quite needleſs, as we have a great number of parties now ſubſiſting who tread exactly in the ſteps of their predeceſſors, and appropriate Chriſt to themſelves, without leaving a poſſibility to the reſt of the world to put in a claim. The church of Rome treats every pretenſion of the kind in all proteſtant churches with the utmoſt contempt. She is however leſs ridicu-

ridiculous than the proteſtant churches, when they treat the pretenſions of each other in the ſame manner. The church of Rome acts upon its avowed principles, the proteſtant churches act in the moſt direct oppoſition to theirs. The grand principle of proteſtantiſm, is the right of every individual to examine the ſcriptures and to judge for himſelf. When he has formed his judgment he has a right, at leaſt as far as religion is concerned, to make that judgment known. Proteſtant eſtabliſhments have generally had the effrontery to deny this right: i. e. they have inſiſted upon it, that the ſcriptures were to be put into the hands of all chriſtians, that by means of thoſe ſcriptures, they might ſee all the errors of popery and the truth of all the principles adopted by their eſtabliſhments. Diſſenters from theſe eſtabliſhments have been obliged to make a greater noiſe about this right, to juſtify their diſſent, though in fact, they have generally been as great enemies to it as the moſt ſevere eſtabliſhment in the world. I know ſome diſſenting miniſters, who

who preach duly againſt popery on every fifth of November, and rail againſt the reſtraints of the eſtabliſhed church with the utmoſt bitterneſs, and yet take every opportunity that offers of encroaching upon the rights of their neighbors, and give certain intimations that with being led into it by education and opportunity, they would have made a figure at the board of an inquiſition. The diſſenters not having it in their power to form a ſyſtem of religious oppreſſion, and to give laws to keep their wretched dependants in order, have obtained many of the ends of ſuch a ſyſtem and of ſuch laws, ſometimes by the charm of the word *orthodox*, and ſometimes by the dextrous management of the phraſe *preaching Chriſt*. The word orthodox is pretty much out of faſhion, and a man would underſtand the application of it to his character equivalent to calling him a blockhead. Now, the only thing left ſeems to be the management of the phraſe preaching Chriſt. I mean, that this is the only public pretence for diſſenting oppreſſion

and

and ill-uſage. I would not be underſtood to ſay, that this is their only weapon; their underhand and ſecret practices are very numerous to my knowledge: and from my knowing nothing of them but as they are forced upon me, and from certain proofs that they ariſe out of ſome of the worſt corruptions of our natural principles, hypocriſy, ſelfiſhneſs and ambition, I cannot help concluding myſelf that they are innumerable. However, we have now to do only with their public inſtrument.

To preach Chriſt in the real ſenſe of the phraſe, is not only important and uſeful, but requires much greater abilities, and a much greater attention than are generally beſtowed upon it. It is eaſy to prove the truth of the chriſtian religion to the ſatisfaction of an audience, which is already in the firm belief of it; it is eaſy to run through all its doctrines, and to ſhew by quotations that they are to be be found in the New Teſtament, to thoſe who have been always taught to think ſo: it is not eaſy, however, to diſcern the tempers

tempers and manners of a ſociety; and when they are known, it is exceeding difficult to apply to them with any ſucceſs. We ſee, that men admit the beſt principles, and yet contrive to evade every good effect of them, and form to themſelves the worſt hearts and the worſt characters. To detect contrivances of this kind, and to convince men of their folly, would be glorioufly preaching Chriſt, as it would be effectually promoting the intereſt of his kingdom. And yet, if a man ſteps out of the common way, of inſiſting upon doctrines admitted, clearing things held perfectly clear, and acting the ridiculous part of one who ſhould carry about his candle in broad day, leſt his neighbours ſhould want light, he is almoſt ſure to have an attempt made upon his uſefulneſs, by having it told of him, that he does not preach Chriſt. The reaſon of this among the miniſters is, that they ſee and envy his ſuperior abilities: but they take care that ſo odious a motive does not appear to the world, and ſeem to ſuperficial obſervers, to be actuated only by a zeal

a zeal for important doctrines. Thus religion, as it is called, is made to cover the ſecret machinations of one of the baſeſt and moſt pernicious paſſions. In this affair, we ſee that theſe chriſtian ſhepherds have not ſimplicity and artleſſneſs in common with their brethren of the plains and mountains: perhaps we may find an utter diſſimilitude between the ſpiritual and the rural tribes, and wonder they ſhould have an appellation in common. But it may be more uſeful here to enquire how the people came to be impoſed upon by ſuch artifices; or rather how it comes to paſs, that they do not deſtroy every effect of them, and encourage, as they generally do, ſuperior virtue and merit.

A good and uſeful miniſter of religion; one who preaches Chriſt, by endeavouring to introduce his principles and precepts into the hearts and lives of his audience; who obſerves their tempers rather than their profeſſions; detects their various tricks to avoid particular obligations, and to reconcile the indulgence of bad diſpoſitions with an opinion that they

they are very religious and very good; one who honeſtly diſcharges this diſagreeable part of his duty is ſure to diſoblige a ſet of people who have a great deal in their power, and who are always revenged for every injury done them. I need not tell you, I mean hypocrites. Hypocriſy may be unobſerved and ſafe, while the preacher is rambling at random through every part of the Bible; and only ſtringing together a number of texts that may have ſomething like a meaning, or perhaps only a word in common: but if another more ſagacious and more adventurous, inſinuates himſelf into her thickets, and lays her open to the world, he ſends out againſt himſelf an enemy, whoſe revenge he will find it difficult to eſcape.

How many valuable men have had their characters blaſted, aad all their abilities for public ſervice rendered uſeleſs, only for diſobliging an hypocrite, who has found means to delude the public into an opinion that they did not preach Chriſt. But there is a vice which, in this caſe, deſerves more notice than

than even hypocriſy, becauſe its influence is more extenſive, I mean ſelf-deception. People generally adopt to themſelves a certain ſet of notions, and fall into certain practices, which form as they think the complete character of a chriſtian. They believe every thing that is great and good of Jeſus Chriſt, and expect hea- as the reward of becoming his diſciples; they go duly to church, and with great plea- ſure attend to the preacher while he is ex- tolling what our Savior has done and ſuf- fered, as highly excellent and meritorious, and the noble advantages we enjoy above the poor people who lived before his time; they punctually commemorate him; they even abſtain from all thoſe vices by which they might incur public ſhame, and diſgrace their profeſſion:—this they think is being highly religious. On theſe general ſubjects they are willing to hear the preacher as long and as often as he pleaſes: but if he ſees into their characters farther than they would have him, and ſets himſelf about cor- recting ſome things which they had rather

not have corrected, he is ſure to diſoblige them, and generally has intimations given him, that he is thought not to underſtand his duty.

He, perhaps, obſerves one of his congregation very punctual and very exact in what are often falſely called religious obſervances, and at the ſame time diſcovering almoſt a total want of humanity; ſeeing his fellow creatures miſerable with little emotion, and never willingly holding out his hand to help them. The preacher, if he does his duty in ſuch a caſe, will inſiſt upon benevolence and charity as abſolutely neceſſary to the chriſtian character; he'll enter minutely into the effects of thoſe amiable principles, and try every method in his power to diſpel the deluſions of a mechanical and ceremonious religion, to ſoften his callous heart, and open it to the ſentiments of humanity and compaſſion. If he has not the uncommon good fortune of immediately ſucceeding, he is ſure of diſobliging. The hard-hearted wretch may now and then have ſomething like remorſe and reproach excited

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in him, and become for a while uneaſy and unhappy; he will at leaſt miſs his uſual entertainment; he wants the peculiar doctrines of chriſtianity, for if he be a chriſtian it cannot ſignify, that he be not a man. "O how comfortable it is, to hear the "mighty things which Chriſt did, and will "do for me! to know that he has died for "my ſins, that if I neglect ſome moral duties, "and am a miſerable ſinner, his blood muſt "have ſufficient virtue to attone for me, and "I cannot fail of the benefit of it if I ſin-"cerely believe in him. It does my heart "good to hear the preacher on ſuch themes "as theſe; to inſiſt on them was the good old "way of preaching, and it was an uncommon "thing to hear a man miſpend his time on "moral duties. Now it is nothing but "charity, charity, for ever; and you would "think the preacher in league with the poor, "to pick your pocket. Little does he know "of the value of money, how difficult it is "to get and ſave it, and he talks of a ſubject "he does not underſtand. I wiſh he would

" confine himſelf within the bounds of his " duty, and only preach Chriſt."

He may obſerve another of his church apparently religious, and yet have the beſt information that he is not ſcrupulous in points of juſtice, and that, in any dealings with mankind, he is given to over-reach, trick and cheat, where he can do it ſafely or in the common way of his trade and employment. The preacher will inſiſt upon ſtrict juſtice, without which there can be no real virtue or religion. The man will ſay, he knows nothing of trade, that it is impoſſible to carry it on to any purpoſe, in ſuch trammels as he would put on; he wonders at the conceit of a recluſe, in imagining he can preſcribe in caſes ſo much out of his way. He had much better keep within his knowledge, and only preach Chriſt.

He may obſerve another very pious, at pious times, and yet perpetually employed in doing very conſiderable miſchiefs to families and individuals, by tale-bearing and ſcandal. He'll think it his duty to reprove this vice with

with ſeverity, as one of the greateſt enemies to the peace of ſociety. "Indeed, things "muſt be come to a fine paſs, that people "are not to ſpeak. The preacher muſt "have very little notion of the pleaſure "of converſation, if one is not to tell "what one hears, to give one's opinion on "what has paſſed, and to gueſs what may "be to come. Good now let him mind "his own buſineſs, and preach Chriſt."

He will, perhaps, glance on the management in domeſtic life, and will poſſibly be ſurpriſed to ſee thoſe who are at the heads of families appearing in the church with every mark of religion, when at home they are unkind huſbands or wives, negligent and unnatural parents. He will haſten to purify this grand ſource of all virtue and all vice, the management of a family. He will call out all his powers to engage them in their duty. If he fails (and the moſt maſterly application may fail) of ſucceſs, they will conſider what he ſays as a ſatire upon their conduct, and the good people will, for once, agree to

abuſe him. "They are the beſt judges, in "their own houſes, and indeed they do not "come to church on Sundays to be told they "muſt love one another, to receive direc- "tions in the management of their children, "and the regulation of family concerns."

If he has the misfortune to obſerve a child unkind to tender parents, diſappointing their expectations, and breaking their hearts in the crueleſt of all poſſible methods; I know not what he can ſay or do in ſuch a caſe: a wretch loſt to filial tenderneſs; who can, even through negligence, render miſerable the authors of his exiſtence, his father, his mother, who have watched over his helpleſs childhood with the tendereſt anxiety, ſpent their time and fortune with chearfulneſs and pleaſure, to prepare and fit him for a uſeful and happy life: gracious heaven! Can there be among mankind ſuch a monſter! The preacher's motive may be amiable to attempt his reformation; but it is to be feared he is beyond the reach of human eloquence. The attempt will cer-

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tainly draw upon him his ill-will; and even this wretch may have the impudence to ſay, it is a miniſter's buſineſs to preach Chriſt.

He may often obſerve people of the worſt tempers appearing with the greateſt outward ſanctity. At church they are punctual in their devotions; at home, among their private acquaintance and to their wretched dependants and ſervants, they are peeviſh, ill-natured, and intolerable. The miniſter will think it his duty to tell them, that religion and virtue are uniform principles; that their effects are permanent; and that they appear always in the general temper and behaviour; that the Deity ſees them at home, as well as at church; and that they cannot be religious without being good-natured and obliging. "What! preach upon good-nature and "good-manners! who ever heard of any "ſuch thing? This may be modern and "polite preaching, but it is not preaching "Chriſt."

As to ſervants, I believe they give a miniſter but litttle trouble of this kind. He

may very uſefully employ himſelf in keeping up in them the principles of gratitude, fidelity and honeſty; but as far as I have obſerved, he need not be afraid of what they ſay of his preaching. He may or may not preach Chriſt; for what they care, as they ſeem to think it the buſineſs of their betters to concern themſelves about religion.

I have pointed out only a few cauſes of the clamour we find raiſed againſt the beſt, nay the only uſeful preachers of chriſtianity, thoſe who explain and enforce its morality. They may ſerve at leaſt as ſpecimens. It would be ridiculous to pretend to point out all of them, as it muſt be unlikely that any man ſhould have obſerved them all, and they are probably as many as the vices of the human heart.

It will be thought, perhaps, that I bear very hard upon characters that have been deemed very reſpectable, on account of their zeal for chriſtianity. I have the moſt ſincere eſteem for every one I know in the world, who has the intereſt of real religion

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at heart. But religion with me includes every branch of piety, of civil, ſocial, domeſtic, and private virtue. If any man, therefore, wants ſome of theſe virtues in his own character, I look upon him, at beſt, but as imperfectly religious: but if he diſcovers any diſlike to hearing any of them earneſtly and frequently recommended, he may diſtinguiſh himſelf by every poſſible mark of public piety; he may pray without ceaſing, and faſt himſelf even to death, I ſhall believe him, after all, to be a bad man.

'What then, the preachers of religion, are 'to be preachers of mere morality?' Certainly: taking morality to include piety. 'What then is to become of the diſtinguiſh-'ing and peculiar doctrines of chriſtianity?' I really cannot tell what is to become of them; and it is impoſſible I ſhould care; becauſe I know of no ſuch doctrines. I look upon chriſtianity to be a ſyſtem of morality; agreeing in every article with the religion of nature; and deſerving credit, for this only reaſon, that it no where contradicts the Deity; and never

never pretends to more than publiſhing his will. Having theſe ſentiments of chriſtianity, I am often at a loſs to know what people mean by any doctrines of it different from thoſe of morality. I ſhould have been intirely ignorant in this affair, if I had not miſpent ſome part of my time, (not a great deal indeed) in enquiring into the diſtinguiſhing tenets of the various ſects of chriſtians. Here I found peculiar doctrines: Athanaſius had one, Arius another, Socinus another, Luther another, Calvin another, Arminius another: but not one of theſe peculiar doctrines could I ever find in chriſtianity; and it ſeems to me, they might as well have pretended to derive them from the plaineſt chapter of *Solomon*'s *Proverbs* or *Seneca*'s *Morals* as from the New Teſtament.

If any one therefore in this congregation has his mind tinctured with thoſe peculiar doctrines, and wants to have them diſputed and inſiſted upon in the pulpit, I am very ſorry I cannot oblige him: I think theſe doctrines no part of chriſtianity; and that they have

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no good influence on the tempers and conduct of mankind: for thoſe reaſons, he muſt even ſet his heart at eaſe, for I never will preach them. I do not make this declaration at random. It is known to ſome who now hear me, that I have ſome reaſons for making it. I beg however you'll obſerve I do not mean to reproach this ſociety; from which I have received every mark of eſteem and kindneſs, which I really ever expected: I reproach not thoſe individuals of it, whom I have now particularly in my eye: I deſire only, if poſſible, to ſet them right on the ſubject of uſeful preaching, and to convince them that to preach Chriſt is to preach all the branches of religion and virtue as they are laid down in the New Teſtament. If I fail in this attempt, I certainly ſhall not in that of ſatisfying them concerning myſelf. It will, I ſuppoſe be granted, that I cannot very well preach out of the New Teſtament, what I do not believe to be contained in it: I expect it to be granted, that if I ſhould conſider the

the New Teſtament as containing principles and precepts which may be improved to the uſe of mankind, and containing alſo ſome things which cannot be ſo improved, but which may have had their uſe: I have it in my power to chuſe what I apprehend to be uſeful, and intirely neglect what is uſeleſs. Aſſuming theſe things, as they certainly belong to me, I will always act, as in poſſeſſion of them; I will never preach upon any but the important, uſeful, i. e. the religious and moral parts of chriſtianity. Out of thoſe uſeful parts, I will chuſe thoſe which I think moſt ſo to my own audience. I cannot help it, if in handling particular tempers and manners, I ſhould make ſome uneaſy, and wiſh I would change my method. I cannot help it, if any indulge a falſe opinion of the nature of public inſtruction. I ſhall always think myſelf ſafe, while I adhere to the moral principles of chriſtianity, and exhort men to improve the goodneſs of their hearts and manners. I ſhall be ſure I do my duty, when my own heart tells me I ſincerely endeavour to

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do it: and I ſhall be afraid of no conſe-quences, even if I ſhould unwarily omit any things which may be important, while I am conſcious of no ſiniſter purpoſe in ſuch an omiſſion, and while according to my abili-ties and my apprehenſion I always preach Chriſt.

THE

HOUSE OF MOURNING;

AND THE

HOUSE OF FEASTING.

BRITISH MUSEUM

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING, AND THE HOUSE OF FEASTING.

SERMON XI.

Eccleſiaſtes vii. ver. 2.

"*It is better to go to the houſe of mourning,*
"*than to go to the houſe of feaſting: for*
"*that is the end of all men, and the living*
"*will lay it to his heart.*"

THESE words have been conſidered by ſome people, as implying a paradox: and the aſſertion in them has been thought indefenſible upon the plain and natural interpre-

tation of the words themſelves. Man, it is ſaid, was made for happineſs: and the evils of human life *may be borne* by him; but cannot be *enjoyed*. They therefore ſuppoſe the wiſe man meant, that it *would be* better in a *future world*, for thoſe who had been afflicted than for thoſe who had been happy in this world. This kind of miſtake led into and confirmed a *general error*, that gloomineſs was preferable to chearfulneſs, that gaiety and mirth were ſinful, and ſeverity, ſelf-denial, and ſuffering, conſtituted the principal parts, if not the whole of religion. The text is not deſigned to countenance any opinion of this ſort: indeed it cannot be deſigned to countenance what is grounded on miſtake, and falſe reaſoning. If we chuſe to ſay, that our exiſtence has any end, as it clearly has, it muſt be happineſs: not in the other world only, but in this likewiſe. Our diſpoſitions to chearfulneſs and gladneſs lead *directly* to this end: thoſe diſpoſitions which render us ſuſceptible of ſorrow and affliction lead to this end alſo, though not directly.

directly. Our diſpoſition to innocent pleaſure and moral joy is in many caſes a virtue of the firſt rank in point of amiableneſs and uſefulneſs. There can be no competition of a diſagreeable kind, between this and any of thoſe virtues which are called out and exerciſed in affliction. Thoſe of the chearful and thoſe of the melancholy kind are all virtues, and of almoſt equal importance to the regulation and happineſs of human life. The wiſe man, therefore, could not mean, that ſorrow was preferable to joy: or that it was better to go to the houſe of mourning, than to the habitations of virtuous chearfulneſs and real happineſs: that it was better to complain than to be thankful; to mourn with thoſe that mourn, than to rejoice with thoſe that rejoice; to be gloomy, diſconſolate and auſtere, than to be chearful, contented and indulgent. The oppoſition here lies between the virtues that are exerciſed in affliction, and the joys of feſtivity, and the ſatisfactions of ſenſual pleaſure. Theſe things take up ſo great a part of the attention of mankind, and

are ſo highly eſtimated, as to have almoſt engroſſed to themſelves the very name of pleaſures. There is ſomething in human nature ſo averſe to ſufferings and ſo abhorrent of any afflictions, that we dread the approaches of them, as of ſomething to deſtroy us. By a great many among mankind, it is thought extravagant to put any ſatisfaction that can ariſe in adverſity in compariſon with the pleaſures of ſenſe, the great objects of their deſire, and in their opinion the great joys of human life. It requires, however, no great degree of eloquence to prove to the ſatisfaction of every *attentive perſon*, that it is better to go to the houſe of mourning than to go to the houſe of feaſting.

To ſuch a one it may be proper to obſerve, that in the former, in the houſe of mourning, we feel the power of moral principles, the exertions of an underſtanding, *of a ſoul*; we feel ourſelves men:—in the other we feel none of thoſe things; and have no teſtimony, at the time and ariſing from the peculiar pleaſures of the place, that we are above the level

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of the creatures around us. But we may go further, and venture the compariſon of every minute circumſtance which may ſerve to heighten the hilarity and joy of the houſe of feaſting, and the ſorrow and affliction of the houſe of mourning.

If any thing can diſtinguiſh a feaſt from a common meal, where hunger and thirſt are merely gratified, it is a kind of ſociability and a love of mankind, which it may have a tendency to cheriſh. This is the ſource of every advantage which we can propoſe to ariſe from it: and, if we conſider the weakneſs of thoſe links which it forms to connect men to one another, you will think this is not ſaying a great deal. It may poſſibly be the means of bringing together, and laying the foundation of a future intercourſe and friendſhip between perſons of real merit. If this were to happen often, we might conſider it as one of the advantages of feſtivity: but it happens ſo unfrequently, and the laws of good-company are ſo unfavorable to it, that we rather conſider this as accidental, an uſe that may poſ-

ſibly be made of it, but is actually very ſeldom made. We will, however, admit that this is one of the advantages of feſtivity. We muſt place it foremoſt, becauſe of all others it has moſt of rational deſign and morality in it.

It may be made uſe of likewiſe as a means to heal the wounds of diviſion and ſtrife, and to bring together thoſe who are at variance. An intention of this kind is a very proper and a very moral one: and, in ſome caſes, it may have its effect: but, unleſs in the caſe of thoſe who are remarkably fond of good-living, I ſhould not be able to anſwer, if I was aſked for a good reaſon, why this method is preferred to many others that might be mentioned. If we paſs from theſe rational feaſts, to thoſe, which indeed cannot be called rational, which, however, conſume the fortune, employ the time, and conſtitute the happineſs of a great many of our ſpecies, the difficulty of ſupporting the aſſertion in the text will leſſen on our hands. With the trifling and inſignificant, they are means of gratifying

ing their vanity and their desire of making a figure. With the gay and joyous, they are the means of dispelling the clouds of human life, and clearing the way to mirth, rant and jollity. With the intemperate and debauched, they are the means of leading into their favorite excesses. The politician creates dependencies; the knave carries on his designs; and the artful secures his measures. In short, it would be tedious, if in an age of luxury it were possible, to enumerate the infinite pleasures and advantages which are proposed from an entertainment or a feast.

We may now turn to a very different view of human nature and human conduct, where, though we often appear, and often deem ourselves to be forlorn, abandoned, and miserable, yet we are far from being hardly dealt with by our Maker. The house of mourning is always, and properly considered, as exhibiting a scene of great affliction: there some of our strongest passions are highly agitated, and we suffer in the most tender and most sensible parts of our minds. This be-

ing the caſe, we can hardly propoſe to the common viſitants of the houſe of feaſting that they ſhould turn in here; they are not fit for the place; they would be ſhocked at the various forms of miſery which they muſt behold; and it would not be a matter of aſtoniſhment if they fled from it as from a place of mere torture and puniſhment. To thoſe, however, whoſe minds are turned for the natural duties of humanity, the houſe of mourning affords ſome of the faireſt occaſions for the exertion of their powers. Whether we are immediately concerned ourſelves, or only obſerve others who are immediately concerned, ſome of the beſt affections of our hearts are excited; and though we ſuffer ſometimes to a high degree of anguiſh, yet we are ſo far from being diſpleaſed or diſcontented with ourſelves, that we indulge our ſenſibility with the greateſt freedom, and with perfect confidence of its being natural and right.

The reaſon of this may be, that the diſtreſs we feel on ſuch occaſions being ſimply

the effect of compaſſion, or ſympathy, it is as *natural* to give way to it, as to the effects of any other affection or principle of our hearts. A fond and good parent aſſiduouſly applying its endeavours to ſave the life of a dutiful and promiſing child; but applying them in vain; and mourning, in the bitterneſs of grief, a loſs which he can hardly ſuſtain; taking pains to recollect and dwell upon every circumſtance that can heighten his ſorrow, is one of the moſt affecting ſituations in which we can be placed. So alſo is that of a child adminiſtering the laſt offices of tenderneſs and duty to a dying parent; alleviating his ſufferings by the moſt diligent and minute attention; ſuſpending every diſpoſition to chearful enjoyment; feeling, by the moſt lively ſympathy, every pain he feels; watching his gradual decay with increaſing anguiſh, and yet uniting to him the more; and at laſt overwhelmed with grief at having loſt what had been the ſole object of its attention, employed all its time and care, and ſome of the warmeſt paſſions

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and diſpoſitions of the heart. This is the caſe, likewiſe, in the relation of brother, ſiſter, huſband, wife, and in that of all virtuous and real friends. Human nature cannot be brought into more intereſting and affecting ſituations, than when thoſe relations are diſſolved. They are neceſſary to the happineſs of human life; they furniſh its higheſt and moſt valuable pleaſures; and to have them interrupted by death, is one of our heavieſt and moſt intolerable afflictions.

A man who has never felt in theſe ſituations as a *man* ought to feel, would here aſk with triumph, How can it poſſibly be better to go to the houſe of mourning than to go to the houſe of feaſting? Such a man would hardly *underſtand*, if he were anſwered, that in the one the ſenſes only are gratified and the appetites indulged; in the other, the heart is affected, its affections are raiſed, and its virtues exerciſed: In the one, we are only animals of an higher order, a finer taſte, and more various pleaſures; in the other, we are *men*, who feel the powers of a rational

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and virtuous mind; our hearts are ſoftened and formed for the beſt duties of humanity. He will probably inſiſt that theſe privileges are not worth what we ſuffer to obtain them. If he does not actually *feel* that they are, it will ever be impoſſible to convince him. The loſs and gain, which we receive in the management of our affections and in the diſpoſitions of our hearts, are not things to be immediately produced and ſpecified to other people; they ſometimes cannot poſſibly be made to appear. We muſt make the trial, in order to know the ſucceſs; and the rewards of virtue are known only to virtue itſelf. If we viſit the houſe of mourning, with all the natural feelings of men about us; if we ſincerely mourn our own loſs, or ſympathize with thoſe we love, who ſincerely mourn theirs, we ſhall certainly ſuffer the ſevereſt anguiſh, and none but ourſelves can ſay either how we ſuffer, or how we are the better for ſuffering. With ſome people, eaſe is an eternal object of deſire; or, if any agitation is

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to be ſubmitted to, it muſt be on the fair and ſmiling ſide of that line which divides the ſcene of human life. Pain of every kind is always an evil, and always to be avoided and deteſted: and yet pain is evidently in the lot of mankind, and as evidently deſigned in the great plan of the Almighty, as pleaſure. *We find*, in innumerable inſtances, that it is of ſervice to us; in the ſituations now mentioned, we ſeek it; we hold it faſt; and ſome have not been perſuaded to relinquiſh their ſorrow and affliction, but with their lives; and yet we call it an evil. Nay, a great many among us can never be perſuaded that it is not an objection to the goodneſs of God. It interrupts eaſe, it agitates the mind, it wrings the heart, and ſometimes breaks it. They do not conſider that thoſe who ſuffer merely from the prevalence of good affections, would not exchange their ſituation with the ſofteſt votary of pleaſure, or the moſt enterprizing ſon of ambition; and that to die in the bed of honour, or in the arms of pleaſure, has

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ſomething little, ſomething brutal in it, when compared with the caſe of him who loſes his life from the tenderneſs of his heart.

I ſhall enlarge but very little upon the reaſon which the wiſe man gives for prefering the houſe of mourning to the houſe of feaſting; "for death is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart." I do this, not becauſe any better reaſon can be aſſigned, but becauſe this has been ſo often enlarged upon, and in ſo able a manner, that you need only turn to a few writers on this ſubject, to ſee every thing that can well be ſaid upon it. And indeed I had a particular view to thoſe opinions which are always referring you to another world, to account for, and juſtify the meaſures of this. Death, as the period of an important life, and the manner of introducing us to a future world, has many circumſtances in it very intereſting and proper to be improved. It would furniſh many unanſwerable arguments in favor of the preference to be given to the houſe of mourning before that of feaſting.

feasting. Those arguments I must not enlarge upon at this time, they, however, may very possibly be the subject of some future discourse. I would only observe, that if I have succeeded in my attempts to prove that it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting, without taking into my account the future rewards of suffering virtue, I have answered my purpose. I do not mean to say, that those future rewards are not most considerable and worthy of regard. But if the state of a *good man* in *this* life, and even under the afflictions of it, is preferable to that of a bad man when his desires are gratified, and he is in the height of prosperity; if his sorrow be in itself preferable to the others joy: what must be the case, were we to suppose the good man to be a good christian, with the certain prospect of that glory and honour and immortality which God has promised as the reward of a patient continuance in well-doing. This destroys all competition, and all propriety of making a comparison.

It lies upon us to prove this very ſatisfactorily to the world, and with great certainty to our own hearts, by being what we profeſs to be, real chriſtians; then we may be in diſtreſs and ſorrow, but cannot be caſt down, or ſink into deſpair; and all our afflictions will not deſtroy the beſt enjoyments of this life; and will work out for us, in another, an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory.

RELIGIOUS SUPERCILIOUSNESS.

BRITISH MUSEUM

RELIGIOUS SUPERCILIOUSNESS.

SERMON XII.

Iſaiah lxv. ver. 5.

"*Stand by thyſelf; come not near me: for I*
"*am holier than thou.*"

THE principle of vanity is not ſo much confined, as, I believe, it is generally imagined to be. Its effects are ſeen, by every one, in the trifling, the inconſiderate, the forward, and the impudent: they are ſeen, perhaps, only by a perſon of diſcernment, under the artful covering of a pretended humility, and the ſelf-importance of a ſour religion.

Every virtue has its counterfeit: and religion or general holineſs, has as many as there are ſpecies of deceit in the human mind.

The pretenſions of a falſe or affected religion are always made in a higher tone, than that of real and unaffected religion: and the general language to thoſe about him, of a pretender to holineſs, is that of the text; "Stand by thyſelf; come not near me: for I am holier than thou."

The ſources of religious vanity, as well as thoſe of common vanity, are to be found in the temper and diſpoſition of the poſſeſſor. They muſt, therefore, be numerous, and conſiſt of a great variety. It is very poſſible for an ingenious perſon to point out exactly, the ſcource of the diſorder in a particular character: but, did I apprehend myſelf to be ever ſo ingenious, I have not to do with any particular character: in a public ſermon, it is only practicable to hint at general cauſes, and to deal in general animadverſions.

The religious pride, pointed out in the text, is at direct enmity with the holineſs, whoſe

whoſe appearance it aſſumes. It may have this quality in common with all other vices. Prodigality is deſtructive of generoſity, though it affects to be that virtue. Avarice is very wide of real prudence; and yet always calls itſelf by that name. And religious affectation and vanity is at eternal enmity with the ſimplicity and modeſty of real holineſs, and yet it would confine the character wholly to itſelf. I conſider this, as a quality of vice, which is peculiarly deteſtable: and I mention it, as a reaſon for the ſeverity with which I ſhall treat the vice now under conſideration.

Holineſs, implies in it, every virtue neceſſary to the perfection and happineſs of a human being. Piety towards God, is one of its firſt ingredients: not that pretended piety which deprives its poſſeſſor of his ſenſes; throws him into a frenzy; makes him rave and tear, and run riot, as in the paroxiſm of a fever: but that which is rational and ſerene, at the ſame time it is glowing and affectionate; and conſiſts in admiration

of the divine perfections, love of the divine character, complacence in the government of God, and reſignation to his will. Holineſs is benevolent and charitable in the moſt enlarged ſenſe of the words: it is as far from pride as from meanneſs: it ſecures the moſt exact juſtice: it is compaſſionate; meek; humble: it appears in the duty of a child; in the tenderneſs of a parent; in all the endearments of conjugal affection; in the loyalty of a ſubject; and in the benevolence of a man, the enlarged affection of a citizen of the world. In ſhort, it is a compoſition of all the virtues. It is eaſy to ſee, therefore, that it is not poſſeſſed by any human being; nor can it be poſſeſſed by any one in a ſtate of imperfection. Thoſe who have made any conſiderable advances towards poſſeſſing it, feel, by a certain experience, that they are at a diſtance from it: and though all their diſpoſitions are tending that way, and they themſelves are going on in their moral attainments, yet, they are never a moment without knowing that, in this world, perfect holineſs is not the portion of humanity. This

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is the foundation of their humility, modeſty, candor, and almoſt all the amiable virtues by which they are diſtinguiſhed. If we were weak enough to ſuppoſe that the angels in heaven, who are ſaid to be perfect, were vain of a certain diſtinction ariſing from their perfection, we ſhould, even then, hardly imagine, that the conſciouſneſs of not poſſeſſing that perfection, which muſt be the conſciouſneſs of every good man in this world, could inſpire any thing like vanity. But the truth is, that the actual poſſeſſion of any virtue, never inſpires vanity: and, it is a rule, which may be applied to every inſtance, without a ſingle exception, that a man, who is vain of an accompliſhment, may be judged not to be really and perfectly in poſſeſſion of that accompliſhment. Religious vanity, therefore, has not its foundation on goodneſs: it has not its foundation on any degrees of goodneſs: it is as diſtant from goodneſs as virtue is from vice. We muſt, therefore, ſeek it among the vices; and examine the weak parts of human nature to find out its real ſource.

I believe, the moſt favorable account which can be given of it is this. In ſome caſes, it may take its riſe, as common vanity does, from a paſſion very natural to the human heart, the deſire of the good opinion and praiſe of thoſe about us. This deſire, in good characters, only keeps pace with thoſe virtues which deſerve praiſe: in faulty characters, it often occupies a principal place in the mind, and directs moſt of its motions to its own gratification. Every thing, in theſe characters, is made to appear as fair and as brilliant as poſſible; no virtue is eſteemed, but that which glitters; and recourſe is had even to the ſmaller deviations of deceit and injuſtice to keep up the appearances which are thought to be neceſſary. Such characters are entirely formed for notice: their poſſeſſors are always puſhing into view: and as they generally find people in the way, they are obliged in fact, if not in words, to bid them ſtand off, and let them be ſeen.

When this vanity, in any character, is accompanied with many imperfect, half-formed

formed virtues, one's heart upon obſerving it, is divided by pity and contempt: we cannot but be affected, at ſeeing diſpoſitions to virtue, like ſo many tender plants, ſtruggling for liberty and life, under the influence of a rank and noiſome weed: and it is impoſſible to avoid deſpiſing a vanity that makes high pretenſions to thoſe virtues which, in fact, it ſtarves and deſtroys.

But we muſt turn to a view of the ſubject more diſagreeable, and which will, probably, excite in us feelings of indignation.

What can we think of a man who makes pretenſions to extraordinary holineſs, without any of thoſe virtues which might ſupport thoſe pretenſions; who appears to be vain of a character he only aſſumes. Such is the caſe of every religious hypocrite. He pretends to uncommon piety; and to ſupport that pretence in the exerciſes of public worſhip, he works up his countenance into uncommon uglineſs, and groans in a tone of uncommon diſſonance; while in ſecret, and in the general conduct of his life, he gives

no proof that he even believes the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, and a Moral Governor. In general, ſuch a man is wiſe enough to make no pretenſions to the ſocial virtues, as in that caſe, the inconſiſtency between his principles and practices would be much more eaſily ſeen than in the other, and more eaſily charged upon him. A perſon known to all about him, to be ill-natured, ſour, peeviſh, ſelfiſh—at the ſame time pretending to the amiable virtues of benevolence, charity, compaſſion—would be a ſubject of high ridicule. He takes care, therefore, to decline ſuch pretenſions; nay, he has the impious audaciouſneſs to treat them as inſignificant, and much beneath the notice of a ſublime religioniſt; a ſaint attentive to the moral virtues; and laying any *ſtreſs* upon being a good huſband, a good father, a good brother; upon being friendly, beneficent, compaſſionate, good-natured, affable, obliging; this, in his opinion, would be trifling with religion; it would be abſurd and reprehenſible. If he ſhould happen to have a dif-

diſpoſition to one of theſe virtues, which even his religion cannot ſubdue, he muſt give way to it. If he ſhould not have ſuch a diſpoſition, and a reward be propoſed in the goſpel for the practice of any virtue, even a moral one; he will practiſe it with a view to that reward; or, at leaſt, to let the world ſee that he regards that reward.

He practiſes ſome of the virtues of ſelf-government, from the meaneſt motives that can enter the human heart; either from penuriouſneſs or falſe ſhame, or with a view to keep up his appearance of ſanctity.

Thus, almoſt without the leaſt degree of thoſe virtues which form a good man and a good chriſtian, he ſets up for ſomething extraordinary; and will hardly deign to aſſociate with thoſe who are really religious, and are modeſt in their pretenſions; and thoſe unlucky ſinners who have had the misfortune to have their failings made known, who have tranſgreſſed, where human laws have forbidden them to tranſgreſs—O fie upon them, ſhock-

ſhocking, vile wretches; *he* would not be ſeen with them for the world!

And yet, if we were to judge of merit, as we *ought* to judge of it, I believe we ſhould hardly find proper company for theſe ſanctified villains in the whole world. The common *murderer* ſeldom or never takes away a life but for the ſecurity of his own, or upon ſome high provocation. The murders of religious perſecution are not only without reaſon or provocation, but the occaſions of them are ſought, they are executed with coolneſs, and with ſtudied circumſtances of barbarity.

When civil laws have tied up the hands of ſuch zealots; and when they offer perſonal injury at their peril; they have recourſe to thoſe infernal arts which, I hope; which, I believe, are peculiar to themſelves; they will break the heart of an amiable fellow-creature, by an unprovoked falſehood, or by a cool and low intrigue.

One is rather puzzled at firſt view, by ſuch characters as theſe. It ſeems difficult

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to ſuppoſe a man converſant about religious principles, and with the means of grace continually in his hands, and yet that he ſhould become more depraved than the worſt of thoſe who are openly profligate and abandoned. The difficulty vaniſhes when we conſider that all the principles of religion are only ſo many reſtraints upon ſuch men; or that they are worn only for ſhew; that they have no other effect on the heart, but to induce it to diſſemble its imperfections and failings, and to give them only ſecret openings. Perſons who are ſincere and honourable exhibit themſelves as they are; well-diſpoſed and virtuous upon the whole; but frail, imperfect, often miſtaking, and often ſinning: but theſe godly men, as they affect to call themſelves, are not content to appear on the common level of humanity; they pretend to perfection: thoſe vicious diſpoſitions which ſpring up more or leſs in every heart, in theirs, having no neighbouring virtues to meliorate and correct them; being denied

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their natural paſſages into action; and being collected and forced into one, like poiſons compounded and confined in a chemical inſtrument, become infinitely more vicious and aſtoniſhing.

However this be, there can be no doubt, but that a finiſhed religious hypocrite, is among the worſt, if he is not the very worſt of mankind. And yet no one is ſo forward to puſh himſelf into notice; no one ſo apt to have the words of the text in his mouth, and to ſay to his leſs artful and more modeſt neighbour, Stand by thyſelf come not near me, for I am holier than thou.

If we deſcend a little from theſe very high pretenſions into the more common walks, of life, we ſhall find caſes of a ſimilar kind. The tradeſman who cheats his cuſtomer by a rule which he practiſes every day, but which he practiſes ſecretly, would be aſhamed to be ſeen with a man who has gone into the prohibited methods of pilfering, and has been detected; though he is not in fact

fact half ſo great a villain as himſelf. The prude, whoſe mind is as diſagreeable as her countenance, as void of every thing lovely and engaging, would not be thought for the world, to have the leaſt compaſſion for an amiable young creature who has fallen by her excellence. She has no notion of being enſnared by virtue; has no mercy on a crime, to which ſhe could not have the ſame temptation; and will cruelly heighten the miſery of another, of whoſe merit ſhe ſhe could never be poſſeſſed.

It would draw me too far, barely to enumerate all the common caſes of this kind. It would, perhaps, be to very little purpoſe, as they are common and known to every one who takes notice of what paſſes in the world. In general, however, it may be proper to obſerve, that it is the characteriſtic of a pretended virtue to be vain. Real virtue is always modeſt and unaſſuming; it is candid, from a real ſenſe of human failings; it is friendly, affable and ſociable, becauſe it fears no eye, and loves mankind;

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it is always chearful, open and generous. Pretended virtue is always proud and aſſuming; it is ſevere and uncharitable, becauſe it is never attended with ſenſibility; it is ſour, diſtant, unſociable, becauſe it fears the near approach of every eye, and has little or no love for mankind; it is always gloomy, reſerved and ungenerous. The prophet, therefore, could not have marked religious vanity, or that affected importance which ſome perſons give themſelves, in a better manner, than by deſcribing them as ſaying to others in the words of the text, Stand by thyſelf; come not near me, for I am holier than thou.

PREACHING AND FAITH

INEFFECTUAL.

PREACHING AND FAITH INEFFECTUAL.

SERMON XIII.

I. Cor. xv. ver. 14.

"*Our preaching is vain, and your faith is* "*alſo vain.*"

THESE words were addreſſed to the Corinthians, and they are very pointed and concluſive in the argument where they are introduced. The Corinthians had difficulties on the ſubject of a reſurrection, which the apoſtle removes in this remarkably elo-

quent chapter. But the Corinthians were perſons of enquiry, and had that deſire of information which generally accompanies the admiſſion of a new religion. The caſe becomes different when a religion is admitted, and eſtabliſhed in all its points; and eſpecially in an age of diſſipation and pleaſure. There can be no difficulties on the fundamental facts and principles of ſuch a religion; and if there were, it would not be to any purpoſe to mention them in ſuch an age. Indeed one of the natural conſequences of luxury is to enervate the mind, and render it incapable of that continued and vigorous exertion which is neceſſary in an argument. We obſerve, as men are ſoftened by pleaſures they become incapable of *attending* to arguments; and writers and even preachers have recourſe to what are called ſentiments, points of wit, and the various affectations of falſe eloquence. If therefore there were any doubts entertained on the ſubject of a reſurrection, I ſhould not expect to be heard with ſerioufneſs and attention, either from the pulpit

pit or the preſs, if I had recourſe to a ſeries of connected arguments. There are no ſuch difficulties: for we are either very well perſuaded of the truth, or we totally diſbelieve it; or we are too indolent and diſſipated to give ourſelves any concern about it. I ſhall not, therefore, at this time, inſiſt upon this as a reaſon, that our preaching is vain, and that your faith is alſo vain. I ſhall take the liberty of applying the apoſtle's words to the preſent ſtate of things; and ſay—If the chriſtian religion is ſinking in eſtimation: if its miniſters have loſt ſight of the purpoſes of their office; or where they have not, are not attended to by the people: if, under pretended improvements in knowledge, and with profeſſions of regard to chriſtianity, we are degenerating in our manners, and becoming more remarkable for our vices; it may well be ſaid, that our preaching is vain, and that your faith is alſo vain.

There are ſeveral facts in the hiſtory of religion which are not eaſily to be accounted for. One is, that it is eſteemed with enthuſiaſm,

when firſt embraced ; and our regard for it grows cooler in proportion as we enjoy its advantages, and are made happy by its means. The idea of a meſſenger of God appearing for the benefit of the world, has ſomething in it ſo ſtriking, that it engages every mind. The gratitude to him has been ſo warm, ſo exceſſive, that he has been adorned with every attribute of omnipotence, and been not only made equal but ſuperior to God, and ſubſtituted for him as the conſtant object of worſhip. This is to be accounted for ; and while they were ſincere and honeſt in their intentions, in a manner which would do honor to the people. But what can be ſaid of thoſe who pretend to have corrected the extravagance of former opinions ; to have obtained more rational and conſiſtent ſentiments ; yet appear to hold religion itſelf as of no value, and behave with an indifference which is more injurious to its intereſt, and more criminal in a moral view, than the moſt determined enmity and oppoſition ? In affairs of the heart, and in the management

management of ſocial affections, it has been the practice of thoſe who underſtood their happineſs, to ſoften the ardor of firſt impreſſions into more calm and pleaſing ſentiments. Thus every ſpecies of friendſhip and all the connections of genuine affection, though they drop their extravagancies in time, by being only meliorated and made more chaſte, their happineſs is rendered more pure, uninterrupted and ſatisfactory. What muſt be the reaſon therefore, that in religion the caſe ſhould be otherwiſe. We meet with hardly any man who avows himſelf an unbeliever; and we meet with hardly any man who will not ſpeak of religion with levity, if not with contempt. Can men believe it to be of God, and treat it in this manner? Can they ſuppoſe it to be his will, by which they are to regulate their lives and to lay the foundation of their future hopes, and yet ſpeak of it with indifference, if not in terms of ridicule and diſrepect? Men would think themſelves injured by a charge of infidelity in this caſe; and yet it would be leſs diſhonorable to them,

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than to be ſuppoſed to believe, while they affect the language of infidelity; as the one may be, at leaſt, an involuntary miſapprehenſion, the other cannot but be immoral, from whatever principle it proceeds. My preſent object is to make you take notice of the principal cauſes of this conduct. The character of a luxurious age is—*Indifference in matters of importance*; *and the moſt exceſſive paſſion for trifles*. It would diſcompoſe the ſerioufneſs which is becoming this place, if I was to lay before you the arrangement of a polite family, and to ſtate the order of its affections, as it is almoſt intirely inverted from that of nature. Be it ſufficient to ſay, that paſſion and rapture are applied to objects that are trifling, ridiculous, or perhaps barely not deteſtable, and that thoſe ties which nature deſigned to be endearing, and thoſe relations which are the moſt immediate ſources of pleaſure, are ſpoken of with the moſt ſettled indifference and contempt. We muſt therefore ſuppoſe that while people were inverting the natural order of their own paſſions, they

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paſſed on to religion, and made it ſuffer the ſame fate with conjugal love, the affection of a parent, or the duty of a child. Hence the contradiction between principle and practice. It is faſhion, that power almoſt almighty among men, which muſt account for this among other abſurdities, that men profeſs to believe a religion which they ſpeak of and treat with every mark of indifference and contempt. Whatever be the reaſon; if this be a fact; and I believe it will not be diſputed; ſo far as it is ſo, our preaching is vain, and your faith is alſo vain.

On the ſubject of religion it is very natural to turn our view to the conduct of its miniſters. If we relinquiſh the high pretenſions of ambaſſadors of heaven, and ſucceſſors of the apoſtles, we reſerve a character of ſufficient importance, as perſons whoſe time ſhould be devoted to enquiries of a religious nature, whoſe buſineſs it is to ſecure the influence of religion on the minds and manners of the world; and whoſe light ſhould ſo ſhine before men, that others ſeeing

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our good works may be induced to honor the principles of our profeſſion, and glorify our father who is in heaven. As men, however, we have ever had our failings, and as conſtituting a profeſſion, we have had ſome faults which have been almoſt peculiar to us. It ſhall not be my buſineſs to open ſo large a view as might be given on this ſubject; becauſe it would anſwer no good purpoſe where there are none to amend by admonition. It ſeems however but fair and equitable, while we are animadverting on the general ill-conduct of religious concerns, to aſſign ſome ſhare of it to the miniſters of religion. We ſhall ſay nothing on the abuſe of power; ſo uſual wherever it is obtained; or on the arts of intrigue and hypocriſy, where there is ſo much to be obtained by them. Theſe are to be claſſed with the vices of the world, and to be left in the general maſs. But there is one piece of miſconduct very prevalent among the preſent preachers, which has a very ill effect on their ſervices, and contributes to that inattention which is to be

be obſerved in their congregations. The general ſubjects of ſermons are too ſpeculative and argumentative to be of any great uſe. In places where Calviniſm maintains its holds, the preacher dwells on an invariable ſet of ſpeculative doctrines, and the people receive them with the hoſpitality and friendſhip of old acquaintance. In others you are generally entertained with the confutation of thoſe doctrines, and with learned diſſertations on free-will, and the rational motives of duty. In this time the peculiar vices of the age are ſhooting up into the rankeſt exhuberance. Well-meaning and ingenious men run into this miſtake, becauſe their knowledge is from reading, not from obſervation. The preſent favorite authors in divinity, direct all their eloquence againſt ſome of the principles of Calviniſm, and moſt of our preachers follow their example, and take their compoſitions as models; not conſidering that the diſputes about which they read do not exiſt: that men in general have either ſettled in their minds all difficulties

ties about religion; or what is worſe, pay very little attention to any thing concerning it. It would therefore be very uſeful, if the ſpirit of democracy were ſo far to prevail in our congregations, that the people might often preſcribe ſubjects of diſcourſe, and employ the abilities of their miniſters on the foibles and vices that infeſt their churches. But where this is not the caſe; where the moſt important and moſt practical truths of religion are inculcated, the attention which is given them is very ſlight and ſuperficial. Our places of worſhip, from having been the houſes of God, and the delight of the people, are now almoſt univerſally deſerted, or they are attended in a manner the moſt ſcandalouſly indecent. To worſhip Almighty God, is the only important buſineſs under heaven on which a man will go and ſleep. This is now become ſo bare-faced a practice; it even ſeems to be a neceſſary part of luxurious indulgence; and being practiſed generally by the moſt conſequential and wealthy people of our ſocieties, our miniſters ſeem to

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be afraid to reprimand it. On this occaſion, our virtuous and pious fore-fathers, have left us many memorable witticiſms, which at the ſame time they ſhew their taſte was not ſo elegant, prove their hearts to have been better, and their religion more ſincere than ours. Public worſhip was then conſidered as a buſineſs of importance, for which they thought it neceſſary to prepare themſelves. They perhaps carried this matter to exceſs; they were right however in abſtaining from the free indulgence of thoſe pleaſures of the table, which however innocent at other times, they found to deſtroy that alacrity and ſpirit which ſhould accompany their devotion. What a preparation, then, for an act of religious duty, muſt be the general indulgence of the preſent times! and how it muſt operate in conjunction with that indifference which is ſo prevalent! We need only have recourſe to religious congregations to ſee the moſt perfect ſcene of heavineſs and dulneſs; we feel ourſelves, as the poet deſcribes Iris to have been, infected with drow-

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ſineſs in the cave of Sleep, even in the time ſhe was delivering a meſſage.

I ſpeak in general; and can therefore ſupport my aſſertion. There are individuals, and I believe ſome ſocieties, who are honourable exceptions in this caſe. I conſider myſelf as now ſpeaking to an audience, which has been remarkable for the decency and reſpect with which it has attended the public offices of their preachers; and I exhibit theſe views of ill-conduct before you, rather as admonitions than reproofs; as inducements to perſeverance, rather than reproaches of your conduct. Our preachers in general acquieſce in the misfortune of having drowſy, and inattentive congregations. Some more ſpirited and adventurous have recourſe to the tricks of the ſtage, and keep them awake by the buſtle and ſurpriſes of falſe oratory. They however injure their audiences in another way; by attempting to make themſelves the objects of admiration, while the buſineſs of the people ſhould be to worſhip God.

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I might enumerate ſeveral ſpecies of miſbe-
aviour in public worſhip beſides that I have
ientioned—But the evil of the preſent time is
general neglect of it. If I did not officiate
s a miniſter, I would ſettle this matter
ith myſelf in a ſhort time. Either public
orſhip is a duty, or it is not. If it be a
uty, the conſequences of my not attending,
r attending ſeldom and with apparent re-
uctance, are as injurious to myſelf, to my
onnections, and to the world, as almoſt
ny immorality I can commit. If it be not
duty, I will not add hypocriſy to the inde-
ency of my behaviour; and I will abſent
yſelf totally. This would be behaving
ith good ſenſe and propriety; but the con-
uct of our modern chriſtians is the moſt
diculous as well as wicked that can be con-
eived. Sunday is the day of convivial aſ-
gnations, and almoſt every man is engaged
i his party of pleaſure. It would be more
vere than religion requires, to ſpeak againſt
oſe little ſocial migrations which the lei-
ure and cleanlineſs of the day give riſe to,
eſpecially

eſpecially among the lower ranks of people. They are conducive to health, and they obſtruct no duty of religion. But, when all the hours of that day are diſſipated; when it is a queſtion with a man whether he ſhall go to church, or ſit to his bottle, or walk in his garden, or ſleep in his chair, we are aſtoniſhed at his folly, as well as provoked at his impiety. Who is this mighty man, and what are his pretenſions! He lives by the goodneſs of that God whom he affects to deſpiſe; all things about him are the effects of his bounty. The man's employment is to collect theſe things for his own uſe, or to ſave the like trouble to others whom he trains in the art of diſperſing them; and when he has run his courſe of a few years, he returns to the duſt from whence he came. This may be a very important creature on ſome ſpots of this world; but if he looks up to heaven, he ſees his inſignificance, and if he has the underſtanding and feelings of a man, he never thinks of God but with reverence, and every ſervice

that has a relation to that great being impreſſes on him ſentiments of humility. What ſhall we ſay therefore to thoſe who ſlight his worſhip? They muſt either believe it is not the worſhip of God; or their ideas of him muſt be very unbecoming and unworthy. The fact may be in this, as in the other caſe. This ſtrange neglect is owing to that general indifference to matters of importance which is the character of luxury; and to be in the faſhion, men are guilty of apparent acts of the higheſt impiety. Our preaching is therefore vain, and their faith is alſo vain.

This is moſt remarkably true in the general prevalence of vice; and the viſible degeneracy of public manners. It ſeems to be in vain that religion is profeſſed; or that there ſhould be an order of men to guard its intereſts, if people are growing daily more corrupt, and every ſpecies of iniquity rears its head without fear or ſhame. It is not merely the language of an auſtere philoſophy, or a gloomy religion that reproaches the

times. Every man ſees it; and every man allows it, while perhaps he is aſſiſting to confirm the truth. Indeed it is a fact to be accounted for; and it occaſions the leſs ſurprize. A great increaſe of trade, has brought vaſt wealth into the country; and this real wealth has been more than doubled by ſeveral ſpecies of imaginary riches. It is a queſtion in true philoſophy, whether riches are at all conducive to virtue. Where they are poſſeſſed, however, they muſt be uſed; and their uſe is productive of luxury; and luxury, whether neceſſarily or not, is in fact productive of vice. This is the ſource of a general increaſe of iniquity; and the great moral and perhaps religious object at ſuch a time is the uſe and abuſe of riches. We declaim againſt every exceſs; and yet people not only proceed in their uſual vices, but add daily to their refinements on folly. In almoſt every family the arts of oſtentation and the principles of pleaſure are the objects of attention and education. For theſe all things are given up. The affections of the heart

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are ſuppreſſed, and every principle of duty is ſtifled; and all deſires ſeem to be loſt in thoſe of appearing wealthy and capable of enjoying pleaſure. This extravagance rages not only where it might be expected, among thoſe who ſhare in the ſpoils of the world, and divide the revenues of the land; but among thoſe who are in ſome reſpects held aloof in the community, and who have been diſtinguiſhed more by the purity of their manners, than any thing remarkable in their faith. There has been a time, when to be a puritan was ſome preſumption of a ſtrict, moral conduct; and the denomination would have been honorable, but for ſome extravagancies in their principles. The diſſenters have taken care to reverſe this matter. They have in ſome degrees adjuſted their principles on the ſcale of reaſon; but their manners will not continue to them the reproach of puritans. They diſſent from an eſtabliſhment which they allow to be in many things very reſpectable; it would be impoſſible from their conduct to ſay wherefore. They

contribute their full ſhare to that vaſt maſs of iniquity which is likely to overwhelm us. All the ſpecies of folly are to be found among diſſenters; and all the affectations of faſhion are to be ſeen in a thouſand inſtances blended with the air of the conventicle. In general, their young people of fortune are educated without the principles of their religion; and if they have a proſpect of appearing in any degree of faſhion, they go to church when they go to any place of worſhip at all. They are thus in every way adding to the public evils, in ſpite of any endeavors which may be exerted to ſtem the torrent, and prevent the prodigious progreſs of iniquity. The religious virtues of the preſent times are candor and moderation; and we cannot ſay too much in their commendation. That uncharitableneſs which doomed all opponents to hell; and that bigotry which would have no connections with men of a different perſuaſion, was a diſgrace to our profeſſion and to our nature. It is a very deſirable ſtate of mind, to be poſ-

ſeſſed of *principles* yourſelf, and to allow others to differ from you. It would have an appearance becoming the amiable ſpirit of our religion, if we occaſionally joined in our ſeveral methods of devotion, while every one in general adhered to that which was moſt agreeable to his principles. This would unite us all in benevolent affection; and would the ſooneſt of any thing deſtroy our differences. But the candor of the preſent times, unaccompanied by principle, and ariſing from puſillanimity and vanity, has a contrary effect. Every acquiſition which our eſtabliſhment has made lately from the diſſenters, is juſt ſo much addition to the public miſchief. You will ſuppoſe I mean not to paſs the leaſt reflection on the eſtabliſhment. It is in general very friendly to the intereſts of virtue, and has as many religious and good men in its proportion as any church in the world. I only mean to ſay that it makes no real acquiſition from the diſſenters. Every man who quits his profeſſion, becauſe he has no religious princi-

ples; becauſe he is told it is neceſſary to put him in the faſhion; and he and his family are to give into the cuſtoms and manners of the age, is a public miſchief wherever he goes, and adds to that licentiouſneſs, and vice which now ſeems to carry all before them. This being the caſe, that all denominations of chriſtians, are ſo far from being burning and ſhining lights in the world, that they are all furniſhing their full ſhare to the evils of the times, and contributing to that general corruption which will deſtroy us—What avails our preaching; and of what uſe is your faith?—The utmoſt that can be ſaid is that the influence of religion retards the progreſs of iniquity. It operates like the power of phyſick, as a palliative in a fatal diſorder: it prevents it from ſeizing all the parts of the body, and delays its diſſolution. All hopes of a public reformation are extravagant and chimerical. All public principles are mere matters of declamation, and virtue is to be found only here and there in the breaſt of an individual. Our buſineſs

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s to cheriſh it where we find it; not to add
o the misfortunes we dread, and to diſcoun-
enance every ſpecies of wickedneſs which
nay come in our way. In ſuch a caſe though
ve have not all the comfort we wiſh from
ur endeavors; yet our preaching, and your
aith will not be wholly in vain.

ON

LYING.

BRITISH MUSEUM

ON LYING.

SERMON XIV.

Epheſians iv. ver. 25,

" *Wherefore, putting away lying, ſpeak every* " *man truth with his neighbor.*"

THE apoſtle's addreſſing ſo improved a people as the Epheſians on the ſubject of lying, is a ſufficient juſtification of any preacher's good manners or decency in addreſſing his audience on the ſame ſubject. The vice of lying is ſo remarkably infamous, that no individual will bear the charge of

it. If you find a man drunk, if you detect him in thievery, or in almoſt any other vice, he has ſeldom any pretence to avoid the charge of it: but detect him in a falſehood, and let your evidence be as clear as can be produced, yet he will never acknowledge it, and will be guilty of a thouſand more to deny his having been guilty of that one.

It is vain therefore for any one who would improve the virtue of mankind, to addreſs himſelf to individuals on the ſubject of lying. He will find none who will admit the propriety of his application. "I have my "faults, God knows; but as for lying, "none can lay that to my charge; and "though it be practiſed by almoſt every "body, it is a vice I always deſpiſed and "hated." This he would obſerve to be the language of every one, and would find it impoſſible to convict one ſinner by a particular or perſonal application. I here uſe the word convict in a different ſenſe from that of the bar or the law. There a man

man is ſaid to be convicted of a crime, when it is proved upon him by credible witneſſes, though he plead not guilty himſelf. In morality or in religion, a man's own conſent is neceſſary to his conviction. He may be charged, and juſtly charged, with an immorality: but if he does not plead guilty himſelf to that charge, all proceedings againſt him, with a view his to reformation, had better be dropt.

As therefore no perſonal applications would avail any thing on this ſubject; as we ſhould find, by every one's account of himſelf, that there is no liar in the whole world; let us ſee, how probable it may be, that we ſhall do good by applications to public aſſemblies or congregations brought together for the purpoſe of being inſtructed in their duties.

Here a man is at liberty to try, to judge, and to acquit, or to condemn himſelf, with the greateſt fairneſs, and without any danger to his character. Sometimes, indeed, this is done, and a public ſermon becomes of very

very important uſe to the happineſs or the reformation of the world. It is, however, but ſometimes the caſe; and but very ſeldom in the affair of lying.

I ſhould have ſaid, juſt now, that upon private applications, at the ſame time every one excuſes himſelf from acknowledging the juſtice of the charge, it is great odds but he would offer to direct you to a great number of his neighbours and acquaintance who ought, in his opinion, to acknowledge it. This practice of viewing the vices of our neighbors while we overlook our own, we ſhall find, not only made uſe of to divert our attention, and to put us off from any further enquiry in our private intercourſes; but alſo a great hindrance to the good effects of public inſtruction. When the preacher points out a vice; inſtead of looking into our own hearts, the only place we have a right to look into, we generally look round the congregation; and afterwards, inſtead of employing ourſelves in improving what he has ſaid to our own amend-

ment,

ment, or our own advantage; we only reflect with an ill-natured pleaſure, how finely ſuch a one was handled, and how properly ſuch a one might apply to himſelf ſome particular parts of the ſermon.

Beſides, we are ſo fond of what we have adopted, let it be ever ſo ridiculous or ever ſo infamous, that we conſider every man who endeavours to deprive us of it, as in that caſe our enemy. I have no doubt but a miniſter appears in this light to every man whoſe vice he directly attacks. The man puts himſelf therefore on his defence. He conſiders the miniſter's arguments as weapons which he ſhould ward off. Every ſevere thing ſaid of his favourite vice, he conſiders as a perſonal indignity; and his angry paſſions are ſometimes with difficulty kept within the bounds of decency.

Theſe and ſome other hindrances are diſcouragements to a public exhortation. However, as there is a probability of its being attended with good effects, at leaſt in ſome caſes, it is the duty of every preacher to try whether

whether any of thoſe caſes may come in his way.

I ſhall take for granted, that lying is admitted to be a vice. I might take up ſome of your time in proving that it is a tranſgreſſion of the laws of nature and religion. But this cannot be neceſſary. No vice is more readily admitted to be one, or more highly decried. It ſhall be my buſineſs therefore to find out and to remove ſome of thoſe reaſons which induce ſo great a part of mankind to be guilty of what they do and always muſt condemn.

Our conſtitution is ſo finely balanced by the Almighty, that every principle and paſſion, acting in its proper province, and having that influence, and that only which is allotted to it, would have a certain effect in improving our virtue and increaſing our happineſs. Among many others, ſelf-love holds a place of conſiderable importance to us, both as individuals and as members of ſociety. The public is made up of individuals, and that paſſion which is pro-

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perly, though entirely employed about the preſervation and intereſts of the individual is not inſignificant in a public view, as it is employed about the preſervation and intereſts of a part of that public, and a whole cannot ſubſiſt without its parts. But when any principle, ſelf-love for inſtance, ſteps out of its province, and invades that of another; the balance in our conſtitution is injured, and confuſion and vice are introduced. This has been often ſeen, and often pointed out in the caſes of ſelf-love and benevolence. They have been known at variance with each other, to have had, as it were, a war of ſome continuance, and at laſt one to have entirely ſubdued the other.

I believe, the firſt temptation to lying ariſes from ſelfiſhneſs, or exceſſive ſelf-love. When this paſſion has acquired ſtrength enough to think of ſwaying the whole heart; like an ambitious tyrant, aſpiring to univerſal dominion, he ſuffers none of his neighbors to be at reſt. The love of truth, a principle which has its province aſſigned it in our hearts, and which is as neceſſary to our happineſs, as

ſelf-love or any other principle, is one of the firſt that will ſuffer by the attempts of an encroaching paſſion; indeed it is one of the firſt that will oppoſe the encroachments of ſelfiſhneſs and therefore one of the firſt that ſelfiſhneſs muſt ſubdue. We therefore ſee, that thoſe who are ſelfiſh, whether in the purſuit of pleaſure, honor, or money, are to a man, liars.

The habit of telling falſehoods, like many of our other evil habits is formed in childhood and youth; and ariſes from an inexcuſable negligence in our education. It is too often thought, that what children ſay, or do, is of very little importance. Nothing however can be of greater importance, if we conſider them in their conſequences. All habits are difficult to be got clear of: thoſe acquired in early life, the moſt difficult of any. This you will be convinced of, by endeavoring to recollect among your acquaintance, one perſon, who is ſuffered to grow up with the habit of lying, and that has got clear of it afterwards.

This vice has been often owing to a kind of religion, which for ſome centuries, has been

been in the greateſt credit, among one party or other in the chriſtian world. It conſiſted of many points and many doctrines which afforded opportunities of diſplaying a low kind of refinement and wit; which were at variance with morality, and every word that was ever uttered by our Savior, and with the utmoſt confidence, promiſed immortal happineſs to mankind, without the beggarly elements of piety, charity, and goodneſs; for believing what they did not underſtand, and performing ridiculous and unmeaning ceremonies. This opened a way for an inundation of vices into the chriſtian world: among which lying made a capital figure. It continues to this day, to be the characteriſtic vice of bigots and the votaries of a myſterious and mechanical religion: and a modern ſaint ſeldom fails of including the indulgence of prevaricating among the privileges of being the child of God.

There are ſeveral other things which give riſe to occaſional deviations from truth; and which have been alledged as juſtifications of them, ſuch as the fear of any great evil

to ourſelves or others from our ſtrict adherence to it. This includes a queſtion of ſome nicety and importance. I propoſe, therefore, in ſome future time to treat of it ſeparately, and at large. I ſhall only now obſerve that our obligations to truth are as ſtrict and invariable as any of our moral or religious obligations; and that no proſpect of danger to ourſelves or others can juſtify our neglect of it; though it may poſſibly, in ſome caſes, afford an excuſe or alleviation of our fault.

Having thus given an account of the principal cauſes of this vice, I proceed to ſhew its miſchievous conſequences.

As it probably has its firſt riſe from ſelfiſhneſs, and is principally ſupported by the ſtrength of that principle, it may be proper to ſhew, that there is hardly any vice more deſtructive of our intereſt. It introduces confuſion and perplexity, where order and freedom would otherwiſe have taken place; and the conſtant fear of detection which always attends it, is more than ſufficient to weigh

weigh down all the little advantages which may ariſe from the practice of it.

It diſqualifies a perſon for every connection in life. A liar is unworthy of truſt in the loweſt ſtations of a community; and a ſervant with that character would with difficulty be employed, and would never be truſted. It makes a man utterly incapable of ſucceeding in any reſpectable branches of trade and commerce; as they cannot be carried on without an opinion of that juſtice and fidelity, which are never to be found in company with falſehood.

A liar is intirely unworthy of friendſhip, as he is unworthy of confidence, without which friendſhip cannot ſubſiſt; for falſehood is attended with diſtruſt and ſuſpicion which muſt embitter every ſocial intercourſe. It renders a perſon highly improper for any of the connections of domeſtic life. A parent addicted to falſehood, is an evil of a moſt important and public nature, as he inevitably tranſmits his vice to his children: no care is ſufficient to avoid this conſequence; no precepts can have ſufficient weight againſt the power of exam-

ple; and there is no concealing a vice of this nature from the notice even of children. Accordingly, we ſee this vice conſtantly transferred from parents to children, without one exception in an hundred inſtances. The evil in this manner takes a wide extent, and aſſumes a threatning and formidable aſpect. The higher you aſcend in the ſeveral ſtations and employments of a community, the more unworthy you will ſee the liar; as the more important the truſt, the more improper it muſt be to commit it to his care.

Hardly any vice can, in a greater degree, diſcredit our religious profeſſion. The religion of Chriſt, is the pureſt and ſtricteſt morality. Its precepts are calculated to form every valuable and honorable character: to remedy the inconveniences ariſing from irregular and violent paſſions; to recover the influence of every virtue, and to train up mankind to reſignation and piety, as the beſt grounds of happineſs in this life and that which is to come. The profeſſors of this religion are ſuppoſed to be devoted to vir-

tue

tue in a particular manner, and to be under engagements of greater ſolemnity and efficacy than the reſt of the world. When therefore, they are not only wanting in that purity and dignity which they are ſuppoſed to aſſume; but are generally guilty of a vice which no part of mankind, in the loweſt ſtages of its barbarity and ignorance, has failed of branding with infamy and deteſtation; they render themſelves remarkably inconſiſtent and contemptible. Are theſe the excellent ones of the earth? Are theſe the children of God, ſeparated from a prophane and wicked world? Are theſe the votaries and diſciples, whom Jeſus Chriſt is to preſent before God as the price of his blood; to introduce into the ſociety of angels and the ſpirits of all juſt men made perfect, and to put in poſſeſſion of that heaven, where nothing that defileth can enter, and which we are expreſſly told to be, and which indeed common ſenſe would tell us, muſt be the reward only of an uniform virtue and real religion?

To give greater weight to what I have ſaid on the conſequences of the vice of deviating from truth, I would remove the opinion which people of this character are apt to entertain; that they have the art of concealing it from the world. Whatever is ſaid againſt this vice has no effect, becauſe they think they are not known to be guilty. This is a great though a general error. Very few of this character eſcape the penetration of their acquaintance. I believe almoſt every liar, is, to a more or leſs number of his neighbours, known to be ſuch. He has the weakneſs to think mankind are blind, becauſe they do not appear to him to ſee. He does not conſider how many reaſons they may have for favoring his ſelf-deception. People ſeldom conſider it as their buſineſs, to tell every man he is a liar whom they actually find to be ſuch: or even to let him ſee by any thing in their countenances and behaviour that they have ſuch an opinion of him. Nay, they think themſelves obliged in civility and good-manners to be ſilent on thoſe occaſions, and and to check any of thoſe appearances.

There

There are a thouſand other reaſons of convenience and intereſt that may induce mankind to deceive him. He is therefore in the caſe of all other hypocrites; while he thinks he is deceiving the whole world, he is himſelf the only one deceived: he takes more trouble to ſave the appearance of a virtue, than would ſecure to him the virtue itſelf; he is unfit for every ſtation in human life, and is a diſhonour to that religion which alone leads to glory, honor and immortality. Wherefore putting away lying, ſpeak every man truth with his neighbor.

The Second Part loſt.

24 OC 62

THE FUTURE REWARDS OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN.

THE FUTURE REWARDS OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN.

SERMON XV.

Revelation xiv. ver. 25.

" *And I heard a voice from Heaven, ſaying*
" *unto me, write, bleſſed are the dead, who*
" *die in the Lord from henceforth: yea,*
" *ſaith the ſpirit, that they may reſt from*
" *their labors; and their works do follow*
" *them.*"

THESE words are introduced with a remarkable ſolemnity, and ſeem deſigned to have more than ordinary influence. Perhaps, indeed, they contain one of the moſt neceſ-

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ſary and happy aſſurances of revelation, and they are calculated to remove the apprehenſions of an evil to which every creature finds himſelf liable. Death, in a thouſand forms, perpetually haunts mankind; we can never think ourſelves ſecure from him; we find him in our food and raiment; he lurks in our buſineſs and pleaſures; he ſometimes taints the whole air about us, and it is impoſſible to move a ſtep without danger of becoming his prey. Upon the ſuppoſition that life is at all deſirable, it is difficult to avoid conſidering death as an enemy, and ſhuning him with horror and averſion: in the happieſt circumſtances, he perhaps cuts us off; when we have formed a promiſing ſcheme, and are eagerly wiſhing for its ſucceſs, he blaſts our hopes in a moment: he regards not the fondneſs of a parent, the tenderneſs of a friend, or the duty of a child; he tramples upon all diſtinctions, and with one fatal ſtroke fells down the prince and the beggar, the beautiful and deformed, the old and young, the wiſe

and

and fooliſh, the good and bad. He ſeems, in ſhort, to have every thing conſidered *in himſelf*, that muſt make him the averſion and dread of every living creature.

This evil certainly never found its way into the world, without the permiſſion, or, which is the ſame, the appointment of the Deity; and therefore muſt have its uſes, as all other evils have.

It was the taſk of religious law-givers, poets, prophets, moraliſts and philoſophers, to find out ſome of theſe uſes, and to bring ſome conſolation to the world, on a ſubject ſo intereſting and important. But inſtead of comfort they generally brought them perplexity; they deſtroyed the principles of natural piety, and made the people more unhappy than they would have been at the thoughts of death. They generally imagined a ſtate after death, but not calculated to reconcile men to the event. The neareſt to truth, and the beſt upon natural principles, is that which derives all ſupport from conſcious virtue, and reſignation to the will of heaven:

heaven: the truth lies in the goſpel; and it is recorded in the words of the text. And I heard a voice from heaven, &c.

It cannot be neceſſary to ſpend much time in explaining the phraſe *dying in the Lord*: as upon theſe occaſions it has been ſo often explained: it means in a few words dying a pious, virtuous, and good chriſtian, of whom it is here ſaid, that he is bleſſed at a time when moſt are in fear and many are in miſery.

The beſt of unbelievers, however they paſs through the world, when they come to take leave of it, ſeldom do it with compoſure; they have uncertainties, and apprehenſions, which they would at leaſt gladly exchange for the faith of the chriſtian.

But this is more the caſe of all the votaries of vice. We muſt imagine this period to be exceedingly different from any part of life: we are diveſted of prejudices, and ſee things with great degrees of truth and juſtice.

The ſenſualiſt has loſt his paſſions, and is without a poſſibility of renewing his enjoyments:

ments: he is now at leiſure to reflect on the exceſſes into which they hurried him: his faithful memory lays before him every inſtance of injured innocence, perjured faith, violated honor, with all their train of villanous actions; and conſcience wrings his ſoul. The miſer has loſt his money; and he is at leiſure to look back on his life: a proſpect barren of every thing pleaſing and happy: not one act of goodneſs perhaps, to balance a thouſand extortions, cruelties, and meanneſſes: and what is almoſt his peculiar caſe, not one real friend to ſooth his unhappineſs; his ſelfiſhneſs has driven from him all the generous and humane; and none keep near him but thoſe who are intereſted in his death; his ſoul is tortured, one while by reflections on an unjuſt and uſeleſs life, and another by apprehenſions of what is to come, by the fear of a future reckoning, and that puniſhment which he begins to think muſt be his due.

The ambitious has full as little reaſon for conſolation. His life has been one continued ſcene of injuſtice, intrigue, and villany. He has purſued his favorite object, without any regard to the rights or ſufferings of others; and he now finds himſelf without any pleaſure from his ſucceſſes, the averſion and curſe of his fellow-creatures, his own heart condemning him, and upon the point of being ſummoned to receive the rewards of his iniquity.—The hypocrite, the ſly and ſpecious hypocrite, is now caught. If he has ſaved his reputation, impoſed upon his acquaintance, and managed his conſcience through life, all is over with him now. His moſt finiſhed artifices, in which he found his greateſt account, are now his greateſt torments: and religion revenges the injury of borrowing her ſacred name, and amiable appearance, in the only manner religion can revenge any thing, by denying her conſolations, and ſhewing her wrongs. The unhappy wretch finds his conſcience let looſe, and like a fury tearing up his heart. She inceſſantly places

places before him the numberleſs inſtances of his inſincerity and falſehood; ſhe leads him in imagination to the houſe of God, and acts over all his religious grimaces; ſhe mimicks his wretched and ſanctified cant before the world; makes him run over his works of darkneſs and all his underhand and ſecret practices: ſhe tells him of every character he has blaſted by ſly innuendos, by back-biting, and ſcandal; of every man he has duped, cheated and oppreſſed; of every unhappineſs he has occaſioned, and every heart he has broken: ſhe makes him imagine himſelf haunted by the ghoſts of his injured acquaintance, feigns their cries in his ears—In ſhort, ſhe makes him feel himſelf to be what he really is, an accompliſhed villain; impious, unjuſt, deteſtable, and fit for nothing but the diſcipline of the infernal ſpirits, who are hardly worſe than himſelf.

After this it is hardly needful to mention thoſe minor ſinners, the thief, the tale-bearer, the drunkard, &c. but only to ſay, that in proportion to the degrees of

their reſpective guilt, they will be removed from eaſe and happineſs at the important hour of death. *Bleſſed* are they only who *die in the Lord.* It is impoſſible for any human-being to find himſelf upon the point of loſing every thing about him, and juſt ſinking into the grave, and not be unhappy, without the ſupports of religion; but with theſe ſupports he may, even in theſe circumſtances, entirely poſſeſs himſelf, and be happy. Very different is his caſe from thoſe we have been juſt taking a view of. The abſence of violent paſſions and diſtracting cares only leave him more at leiſure to look into his amiable mind, and to contemplate with delight the beſt graces and virtues planted there. Conſcience, the greateſt torment of the wicked, is the good chriſtian's beſt friend: ſhe is aſſiduous in bringing him every comfort; ſhe makes him enjoy over again every proof of firmneſs in reſiſting temptations to evil, every act of humanity and goodneſs in his paſt life; ſhe calls to his mind every diſtreſſed creature, to whom

whom he has afforded any relief, and even his intentions and wiſhes to do good where his power has failed him: ſhe forgets not, above all, his piety toward God, the punctuality and ſincerity with which he has ever attended his worſhip, the reverence and pleaſure with which he ever thought of him, and obeyed his will, and the perfect reſignation and chearfulneſs with which he ſubmitted to all his diſpenſations. What ſituation can we poſſibly imagine a man in, and not think he may be ſupported by ſuch recollections? they are as miniſtring angels, ever preſent to his mind, chear his fainting ſpirits, and enable him, as the laſt and higheſt act of religion, to bear undiſmayed the diſſolution of his body, and with full confidence and chearful piety to commit his ſpirit into the hands of his faithful Creator.

It is no objection to the truth of what has been aſſerted of the influence of religion at the death of a good man, that it is ſometimes prevented in his very laſt hours by extraordinary diſorders of body; and from peculiar effects of theſe diſorders, that he may ſome-

times go off diſtruſtful and apprehenſive. What has been ſaid is ſtrictly true, as long as the underſtanding retains its proper influence.

All doubts are momentary only, in truly religious and philoſophical minds, and are ſoon loſt in agreeable views of the divine government, and the moſt numerous and undoubted aſſurances of God's love to mankind.

We ſhall now proceed to another part of the text, Yea ſaith the ſpirit, they ſhall reſt from their labors, and their works ſhall follow them.

This is all that the goſpel teaches us concerning the future ſtate of good chriſtians. Sometimes indeed our Savior and his apoſtles aſſume the more animated language of perſuaſion; and in talking of the pleaſures of heaven allude figuratively to our preſent pleaſures. Sometimes theſe are painted in the joys of a marriage feaſt; at other times we read of everlaſting kingdoms and crowns of glory which fade not away. We can only gather from ſuch faint images that the happineſs of heaven is very great, and far exceeding

ceeding every thing we can now conceive of: they lead not to the true knowledge of the happineſs they deſcribe; and all the ſcriptures clearly and certainly inform us of, is, that we ſhall reſt from our labors, and that our works ſhall follow us.

In this ſtate we are placed low in the vaſt ſcale of beings. The various ſpecies of creatures beneath us are with much reaſon ſuppoſed to be leſs numerous than thoſe above us. We are taught to believe that things are in a progreſſive ſtate, moving forwards from good to better, and that all the creatures of God are approaching him more and more in degrees of excellence and happineſs. Not that any being exiſting hath really good reaſons for diſcontent in his firſt and proper rank: even the poor reptile, who dies a lingering death, by the wantonneſs of a brutiſh and uneducated boy; and the yet more pitiable bird, condemned to pine away its life to gratify whim, caprice, and falſe taſte in an overgrown baby, have undoubtedly, *upon the*

whole, reaſons for being ſatisfied with their exiſtence. Man, placed many degrees above them, has abundantly more reaſons. From his very birth, he ſeems here to be the peculiar care of heaven: every thing is calculated for his uſe, and all the other creatures are ſubject to his dominion: the earth, the air, the ſea, and even the heavens contribute to his happineſs: his mind has a great degree of intelligence and knowledge, and his heart is the happy ſeat of piety, friendſhip, benevolence, charity, and all moral goodneſs. When a man in theſe circumſtances does not pervert his own bleſſings, and harbor ſome vicious coroding principles and habits, it is impoſſible but his exiſtence here, were there no other ſtate, muſt upon the whole, be a high degree of happineſs.

But however, it is far from the idea we have of perfect happineſs: indeed it is abſurd to think of perfect happineſs to imperfect creatures, and we ſhall be removed from it as long as we are liable to the leaſt degree

of

of error, or the ſlighteſt taint of vice. In this ſtate we are liable to very great degrees of error, and we have inſtances of wickedneſs poſſeſſing almoſt the whole ſoul of a man. Impiety, roguery, hypocriſy and injuſtice are far from being ſtrangers amongſt us, and wherever they are, they blaſt every thing about them: they firſt of all indeed and principally exert their curſed influence in the minds that harbor them; but they reſt not without attempting to break in upon the peace and happineſs of others. Theſe vices ſhade our proſpect of life, ſometimes very deeply; and their effects, when united in ſome extraordinary caſes, are ſo ſhocking that many unhappy ſufferers have heſitated about the prevalence of equity and happineſs in the government of God. I have been more diffuſe upon this article, becauſe it is neceſſary to prevent miſtakes in what follows; and becauſe it may throw ſome light upon a queſtion, that is ſeldom treated juſtly. The peculiar advantage of chriſtianity in the aſſurances of a future ſtate has rendered moſt chriſtians incapable

of

of giving it any chance of a fair diſcuſſion. They are told there is an infinitely better ſtate before them, and like children, when they ſee any thing they deſire, every thing they poſſeſs is thrown by, as without uſe and value; they become fretful, reſty, out of humour with the world; and ſometimes by their impatience to go to heaven render themſelves unfit for it.

What has been juſt advanced does not at all affect the propriety of what is ſaid in the text, that thoſe who *die in the Lord, ſhall thenceforth reſt from their labors*; as the future ſtate will undoubtedly be a vaſt improvement upon this; the toil of buſineſs, the diſtreſſes of poverty, the anguiſh of diſorders, the plagues of ill-nature, inſincerity, malice, and iniquity of all kinds ſhall not be known there; *all tears are to be wiped away, and there ſhall be no more ſorrow nor pain.*

And whatever good men have done, ſhall not then be forgotten: if they have fed the hungry, cloathed the naked, protected the orphan, conſoled the widow, relieved the priſoner,

priſoner, and aſſiſted the ſick; if they have cheriſhed every good and amiable diſpoſition in their hearts, humanity, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering; if they have particularly cultivated the principles of piety: if a regard to the ſacred preſence of Almighty God has ever influenced their thoughts; if his goodneſs has been their joy, and the pattern they wiſhed to imitate; his juſtice their confidence, his mercy their hope, and his will the rule of their actions. Theſe works ſhall certainly follow them; and every virtue without interruption and without alloy, ſhall have room to exert its utmoſt influence. All the exquiſite pleaſures of benevolence, and all the ſacred joys of friendſhip will be enjoyed in the pureſt manner, in a ſociety with thoſe happy ſpirits, among whom, nothing that defileth can enter, and who are ſtrangers to every malignant diſpoſition: at the head of whom is Jeſus the Mediator and Savior, whoſe higheſt pleaſure muſt be the happineſs of his faithful followers, and who undoubtedly

undoubtedly will omit no occaſion of promoting it. Our piety then will be well grounded and ſatisfactory—We now ſee the divine perfections *as through a glaſs darkly*; our knowledge of the Deity is next to none at all, and the ſimpleſt of his works is above our comprehenſion: we ſhall then have more enlarged views of his government, deeper inſight into his works; and our gratitude, love, confidence and joy in him will be infinitely more animated and uniform. Though then we ſhall find he dwelleth in light inacceſſible, that his glory is ineffable, and his greatneſs incomprehenſible.

AN

ESTIMATE

OF

HUMAN LIFE.

AN ESTIMATE OF HUMAN LIFE.

SERMON XV.

Pſalm xxxix. ver. 4.

" *Lord make me to know mine end, and the*
" *meaſure of my days, what it is, that I*
" *may know how frail I am.*

I Wiſh to avoid ſhocking [illegible] of people; eſpecially thoſe [illegible] conſcientiouſly taken up [illegible] ples; when I can do ſo [illegible]

duty. On the ſubject of human life; it might be ſuppoſed we ſhould have but little trouble from any principles which could affect a juſt and proper eſtimate of it. It muſt ever have been the great object of human attention; and yet the miſtakes committed in regard to it, do not ſeem to be leſſened in number; and men now act as fooliſhly, as immorally, as they ever have done, and are as truly miſerable as they ever have been. We ſhall not wonder to ſee that this is the effect of vice; for we are taught to connect vice with miſery; but that men ſhould be unhappy from their religion; that what they hold moſt ſacred, and expect the greateſt advantage from, ſhould not only make them ridiculous, but become their torment, is one of thoſe difficult problems with which the ſcience of human life is perplexed.

The whole art of living; the whole buſineſs of religion; the whole duty of man, would very eaſily and naturally follow a true and proper eſtimate of life. The eaſe with which it might be obtained; and the plain-

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neſs and ſimplicity of its principles is one reaſon perhaps why it is not generally adhered to. It would furniſh but few materials towards any of thoſe ſyſtems of faith, and thoſe perplexed and myſterious religions which have been ſo hurtful to the virtue and peace of the world. I am not afraid you will think your time miſemployed in recollecting thoſe ſimple principles, if I can, at the ſame time, induce you to try their effects on your conduct and happineſs.

Mankind have been placed in this world by Almighty God, a being ſupremely wiſe and good. He has given them certain powers, which lead to a certain kind of conduct, and which will procure a certain degree of happineſs. This muſt be true; or there is no God. He has aſſigned to men a certain term of life; has divided this into ſeaſons; and allotted to each of them its duties and enjoyments. The ſucceſſion of ſpring, ſummer, autumn, and winter, are not more regular than theſe ſeaſons, nor their reſpective buſineſs more known or better defined. The ſeaſon of

education, when all the virtues are forming, and throw out their firſt bloſſoms in the mind. That ardent period of youth; when every paſſion glows with a divine enthuſiaſm; when we form the connections of friendſhip and love, and open our hearts to the warmeſt and nobleſt affections; when we incorporate with others, and act and feel as parts of a family, a community, or a world. That more mature and ſober ſeaſon of manhood, when we, as well as the world, reap the fruits of our early culture; when activity begins to give place to reflection, and we employ ourſelves in directing and training up others to the buſineſs of life. And thoſe years in which we are to live on our ſtock; and to be happy or miſerable according to the proviſion we have made. Theſe are the diviſions of human life; and the whole art of being happy is to ſuit our views, deſires, and actions, all to their proper periods. No petition therefore can well be more important than that in the text, "Lord teach me to know mine end and the meaſure of my days,

days, that I may know how frail I am." But perhaps this general view of life does not anſwer to the preciſe meaning of the pſalmiſt. At the ſame time that he hints at a meaſure or term, he ſpeak of life as frail; and though threeſcore years and ten may be filled up by the ſeaſons of youth, manhood, and old age; yet the general term of life is not ſo extended. There is not any thing like the variety in the flowers of the field, thoſe conſtant emblems of human frailty, as in the conſtruction and texture of men. All things in the natural world may be reduced to claſſes, and we acquire a knowledge of their rank and duration. Mankind are either not to be ſo reduced; or we are not capable of diſcerning their diſtinctions, and properly arranging them. The death of man therefore ſeldom happens like the dropping of a flower, at a period marked and expected. Almoſt every event of this kind has its diſtreſs doubled by ſurprize; and comes upon us unwelcome, and we think it unſeaſonable. This is owing to our ignorance.

Every thing is under the government of God as it ſhould be; and he diſplays his perfections in the child, as well as in the flower that lives a day. This the fond and impatient mother perhaps will not allow. Her imagination had drawn out all the pleaſing ſcenes of a happy life, and ſeen his generation go before him. She was unfortunately miſtaken; ſhe thought ſhe was rearing a goodly and fruitful tree, when, in fact, ſhe was employed about a beautiful, but a barren and tranſitory bloſſom. We are apt on theſe occaſions to lament our loſs, and the loſs of the world, from the interpoſition of death, where we imagine a variety of the happieſt conſequences would otherwiſe have ariſen. All the deluſions of imagination! Every man has done his buſineſs in this world, when Providence permits him to die; and no ſpark of intelligence, no degree of goodneſs, no particle of matter is loſt, or waſted, or thrown away in the œconomy of heaven.—What are we to do then? to view human life, as it has been repreſented

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is viewing a moſt uncertain and confuſed ſcene; where no eſtimate can be formed of its value, becauſe its duration can be judged of by no rule. Not ſo neither—Nothing can be further from confuſion than the natural and providential diſpoſition of things. Our ſyſtems, and our deluſive prejudices may involve us in confuſion; but human life is as it ought to be; various indeed in its events; but miſerable only to the wicked. The uncertainty of life, is the very principle on which a virtuous prudence is founded; if it had a certain and diſtant period, it is not eaſy to enumerate the inconveniences which would ariſe from crouding all our views towards a diſtant event—It would be like the doctrine of a future ſtate to moſt of our religious neighbors. All their religion has a reference to heaven; they contemplate heavenly things with much rapture, and they are to be very happy, if not very good, in heaven—all the intermediate time, is not at all the better for their religion; and all who are connected with them, have reaſons moſt cordially to wiſh

their departure. The philoſopher who falls into the ditch becauſe he will contemplate the ſtars, while he is purſuing his buſineſs, or taking his walk, and the man who overlooks his duty here to keep his eye on heaven, are in the ſame forced and unnatural ſtate of mind we ſhould be in, if we conſidered the period of our lives as certain, and appointed at ſome diſtant time. As it is, we are bound to the buſineſs of the preſent moment, and we neglect it in viſions and prognoſtications generally at the expence of our happineſs. There is ſomething however like a general extent of human life; the pſalmiſt ſays it is threeſcore years and ten. It is terminated by no certain boundary, but his eſtimate is the neareſt that can be made. All thoſe general deſigns which have a reference to the whole of life, ſhould be regulated on the preſumption of this extent; and a man ſhould act in them as one who is to live threeſcore years and ten. The natural love of life keeps us here very tolerably to our duty. We ſeldom are wanting in allowing time

time enough for ourſelves here. The want of an accurate and defined limit, makes our imaginations run into a confuſed infinity, and we ſeem to have no end to our lives becauſe it is not fixed to a day. The duration of a taper depends on accidents in its uſe; and the very moment of its extinction is delayed or haſtened, by ſome little circumſtances perhaps in the air, which cannot be counted upon. We know however nearly its duration. It is ſo with life. Some circumſtances of imprudence, or fault, or accident, may make the difference of a few years; but they can be only a few; and the man who exceeds the common limits in his views, and forms his deſigns accordingly, acts unwiſely and imprudently. He labors in vain while he leaves not ſufficient time to accompliſh his purpoſes; and he waſtes thoſe talents and that induſtry which might be well employed in things which he can thoroughly accompliſh.

Though this be the error generally exclaimed againſt by divines, and though it be

one of pernicious conſequences; yet I do not think it ſo pernicious as the other, which they ſeem to countenance, that of not ſetting a ſufficient value on life.

The pſalmiſt prays to God that he would teach him the meaſure of his days, that he might known how frail he was. The common reaſoning on this matter ſeems to be abſurd. Men are frail; and life is uncertain—it is therefore of no value. I ſhould think the matter ſhould be inverted. Life is precarious, and therefore every moment of it ſhould be highly eſtimated. The common method of enforcing the doctrine of a future ſtate, has produced this error and all its injurious conſequences. You may ſuppoſe I do not mean to controvert the doctrine itſelf. But I know nothing ſo injurious to virtue, as the general application of it. Every pretender to religion, ſeems to think himſelf entitled to keep this by him as a general ſuccedaneum, or a reſource to which he may fly when he pleaſes. If he has injured his health by imprudence

prudence and folly, he has the impudence to call his body a carcaſe, and devoutly looks forward to a time in which he ſhall ſhake it off. He may depend on it he will never get a better, till he has learnt to uſe what he has well. The mind is ſuffered to be overrun with errors; and the heart is the ſeat of every froward and vicious paſſion—No matter—heaven will ſet all things right. The papiſts have had a decency in their ſyſtem, which is much wanting in ours. They ſend all to heaven who die in the faith of the church; but not till they have been a proper time in purgatory. I have not heard what proceſs the ſouls of our worthleſs and wicked ſaints are to go through to fit them for the pure manſions of the bleſſed. I ſhould ſuppoſe a miracle neceſſary in the caſe of every one of them. This is no objection with ſome people; they reaſon themſelves into perplexity on the ways of God; and they get clear by ſaying he works a miracle. This muſt be one of their miracles; and one of thoſe which it is not poſſible for

Omnipotence

Omnipotence to perform. I adore, with awful reverence the almighty power of God; and ſhould inſtantly feel myſelf the meaneſt of wretches, if I aimed to derogate from his excellent greatneſs, but I will vindicate his moral character from the impieties of men. I repeat it therefore—that if you die a worthleſs wicked man in any degree, God Almighty could not place you where nothing that defileth can enter; he cannot be unjuſt; and he cannot even reward without reaſon. If he admitted you into heaven, you would be an improper inhabitant. If he worked a miracle on you, or tranſplanted into your ſoul the virtues and righteouſneſs of another: this would be converting you, by a kind of art, into another creature; and it would not be you, but another who would inherit the promiſes. All theſe, and many more than theſe, are the tricks and inventions of men, to avoid the reproach of preſent inattention. Nothing in the world is more common than to hear a man refer himſelf to future bliſs as the reward of ſuffering the immediate

mediate conſequence of his own iniquity. The only juſtifiable method of referring people to futurity, is to ſay, *As ye ſow, ſo ye ſhall reap.* It is impoſſible to ſuppoſe a man to riſe any other than he fell; and whatever perfection he arrives at, muſt be the effect of time, application and induſtry. This is all which it is poſſible for us to believe; I mean thoſe of us who believe only what we underſtand. Every thing beyond this is injurious to that attention to the preſent life, and that improvement of our preſent time, which it is now my object to inſiſt upon. Our buſineſs is ever in our own hands, and all our happineſs is produced by ourſelves. If I commit a wicked action, it cannot ſignify whether I feel its conſequences here or in the moon; they would be the ſame, while I continued the ſame. The only poſſible difference between heaven and hell is that of a good and bad mind. I mean not to unſettle your minds on any uſeful and virtuous principles. To deprive you of ſome of thoſe you ſet a value upon, would be no injury. Men have

have more principles than they know what to do with. They are overwhelmed by doctrines, notions, and opinions; their lives are therefore equivocal, inconſiſtent and confuſed.

The true principles of any art are few and ſimple; but a real artiſt only can ſucceed by them. Inferior geniuſes, muſt multiply their principles, and make you ſtare at their ornaments, becauſe they cannot make you feel their beauties. It is ſo in goodneſs. The truly good man, has his duty always before him in a few, but unchangeable maxims. Every action is well directed; and every affection is well ordered and diſpoſed. The various pretenders to goodneſs, have no taſte for a character ſo plain, ſo unornamented. There muſt be always ſomething to ſhew; ſomething to be admired; or what do we take any pains for? Every action of theſe people has a multitude of motives. Hence the ſtrange and unnatural appearance of their virtues. They are like nothing in heaven or earth; they are puny deformities produced by ſuperſtition on very weak and imperfect conſciences.

Men

Men are ever in confuſion, perplexed and unhappy, for want of minding their preſent buſineſs, and that only. This would be the conſequence of a proper eſtimate of human life. If we conſider it as to be extended nearly to a certain length, to threeſcore years and ten, all our large and public-ſpirited deſigns will be fixed on their their proper foundations. But as every moment ſhould be conſidered as in ſome meaſure precarious, our attention ſhould ſtray as little as poſſible from the objects before us, or the buſineſs of that ſeaſon on which we are entered. In this manner our youth ſhould be employed in occupations ſuited to that ſeaſon. It is while our hearts are warm and generous; and when ſelfiſhneſs, and intereſt have not encroached on our minds, that we are perhaps to form the beſt purpoſes; it is then certainly that we form moſt of the connections of friendſhip and love. We may ſafely leave it to the prudence of after-times to guard us againſt hurting ourſelves. I may be exclaimed againſt as advancing a dangerous poſition,

and

and referring to youth what ought to be the determination of age. I am not explaining to you the laws of the land, or the paltry intereſts of families, and of individuals, but I am exhibiting the truths of nature. And having nature for me, I care not who may be againſt me. Every ſeaſon of life has its peculiar productions. They are appointed by God; and we might truſt to their propriety. If in youth we are open, candid, and generous; and this appears to be a determination of nature, our fathers are not wiſe in wiſhing us otherwiſe. If at that ſeaſon we are impelled into the intimacies of a diſintereſted friendſhip, or of any warm and generous affection, it is right it ſhould be ſo: and any inconvenience that may attend our imprudence is not comparable to the evils of checking our natural diſpoſitions, and forcing in our minds the premature fruits of prudence and diſcretion. I will ſpeak plainly. The moſt important connection in human life, where it is left to nature, is ever happy. The ſavage Indian,

glows

glows with an ardor of love, and has a generoſity and tenderneſs to his female companion, which we know but little of. He has been directed in his choice by the affections of his heart. Among us marriage is becoming a word of reproach. Why? Becauſe marriages are unhappy. This is ſo notoriouſly true, that in all converſations you ſeldom hear it mentioned but as a lottery; a matter of infinite precarioufneſs and danger. What danger from a perſon whom I have choſen out of all the world; and for whom I have more than friendſhip? Oh, but you talk wildly; you do not know the world; there are hardly any marriages ſo contracted!—And therefore there are hardly any marriages happy. I recur to my maxim, that thoſe connections which produce the moſt important events of life, are to be left to the heart before its principles are corrupted by the cuſtoms of the world. The man who has not been uſed from his youth to indulge the ſpontaneous impulſes of his mind, will never have a friend, and the man who forms his

plan

plan of domeſtic happineſs merely on maxims of prudence, will find his labor for his pains. Diſcretion and prudence are virtues of great value; but they are the ſervants of higher ones; and they are brought into exiſtence at that late ſeaſon when their ſervices are wanted. In youth therefore let us cheriſh the noble principles of that period. Let us turn a deaf ear to all maxims which may check the warmth of our virtuous affections; and never be prevailed upon to be miſerable from fore-caſt. Things in this life ought not often to be anticipated. They may or may not come to paſs; and we may or may not live to ſee them. Our preſent happineſs is therefore our only object; and we are to purſue that and that only ſo far as it is conſiſtent with the happineſs of others and with the general rules of virtue; ſo far indeed as we ſhall find it to be happineſs.—When you are arrived at what you call years of diſcretion, I believe I might ſave myſelf the trouble of adviſing you. Few men at that time will take advice; and fewer yet, with all their

their imagined wiſdom are capable of profiting by it. Men at that time have fixed their principles, if they happen to have any. Every thing is ſettled and confirmed in their habits; and nothing can well be more impracticable, than to induce them to quit thoſe habits. Some little ſcope however is left, in the caſes of a few, for improvement by advice. Though in nineteen actions out of twenty, we are as mechanical as a clock; and move only from habit; yet there are moments in which the underſtanding ſeems to aſſert its power; and we act as reaſonable and moral creatures. Indeed at this time we have need of the moſt vigorous exertion of our underſtandings. Every thing important in life is very much under our influence and direction. We are magiſtrates, parents, or in ſome other relation which immediately affects the public intereſt. We ſhould therefore quit the peculiar purſuits and pleaſures of youth; and never have recourſe to them but as occaſional relaxations. The ſame evils ariſe from a boyiſh and trifling man, as from a pru-

dent and crafty youth. Manhood indeed is the age of diſcretion. The virtues of our youth; and the connections we have formed in that enchanting ſeaſon are all chaſtened, meliorated, and rendered more pure and pleaſing, by the prudence and wiſdom of a riper age. As to ambition, avarice, and ſome other paſſions which form themſelves into ſtrength at this time of life, I have little to ſay to them. It is eaſier to check them entirely than to regulate them. The duties of domeſtic life are more obvious and more important. To keep always in mind, every conſideration which may preſerve that domeſtic friendſhip, and that conjugal honor and affection, which forms your happineſs is the firſt duty in ſuch a ſtate. To give your children an education, which leads to virtue; which will make them happy, by making them good; and will lead them through the temple of honor, to that of glory and fame, is your principal employment. I wiſh I could ſay there was any probability of your quitting ſome of your

maxims

maxims and cuſtoms on this ſubject; where you certainly catch at a ſhadow and quit the ſubſtance.

As to old age; very little can be ſaid to the old man who has lived a bad life; and few perſons are happier than an old man who has lived a good one. Old age is the winter of life, when we live on the fruits we have gathered in the harveſt, and we are well or ill provided for, according to the quantity and nature of thoſe fruits. This is the unalterable law of Providence; and no art of ours can violate it. We muſt then live on the effects and the remembrance of our virtues; and no money can purchaſe for us thoſe of other people. Our friends, our children, and our fortunes, afford us juſt ſo much pleaſure, as we have employed wiſdom and goodneſs about them. And it is in vain we complain when we have none to blame but ourſelves. With ſome indeed this does not ſeem to be an age of reflection. They appear to have a ſecond childhood, and to begin the world anew. They are ſo ſenſible of the

errors

errors of their paſt lives, that they are deſirous of giving a ſpecimen of better conduct. I will not ſhock your ſenſibility by exhibiting an old man in love. It is a hateful ſight; and the diſpoſition that produces it, ſhould be treated as a ſpecies of madneſs. At leaſt it ſhould not be tolerated in that kind of lawful proſtitution, which has ſo often diſhonoured one of the holy inſtitutions of our church. Ambition ſeldom torments an old man. Avarice is his vice. To check even this, it would be very uſeful to keep in mind the petition of the pſalmiſt: *Lord make me to know mine end and the meaſure of my days, that I may know how frail I am.*

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